

- [Pyltsyn, A V](#)
 -



Pyltsyn A V

Free kick, or How an officer's penal battalion reached Berlin

AV Pyltsyn Penalty

kick, or How an officer penal battalion reached Berlin Reviewers AI Velichko, member of the National Union of Journalists

of Ukraine, editor-in-chief of the Kharkiv regional newspaper

"Veteran's Word"; V. K. Vokhmyanin, leading specialist of the Department of Culture of the Kharkiv

Regional State

Administration, member of the Council of the Kharkiv Branch of the

Ukrainian Scientific and Historical Society; V. G. Taranov, Doctor of the State

Academy of Municipal Economy Dedicated to all officers,

penitentiaries and

their

technical

Sciences,

Professor

Kharkov

commanders of the

8th Separate Penal Battalion of the 1st

Belorussian Front, who reached Berlin through the difficult roads of the war.

INTRODUCTION,

or a word to the reader,

in which the author explains the reasons that led him to write this book and expresses his heartfelt gratitude to all those who inspired him on that

work and helped in its implementation.

Whistled by the mortal wind, in snowstorms,

downpours and dust, we walked

kilometer after kilometer towards our

cherished goal. Alexei Surkov I

spent my part of the

Great Patriotic War as a platoon and company commander in an officer's penal battalion. for many years me

I was worried about the atmosphere of some strange silence in the literature, the press and in general in the media about the history of these penal battalions. As you know, they began to be created in 1942 after the order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR No. 227, familiar to many as Stalin's Order "Not a step back!" But nowhere, neither in various kinds of publications, nor in the military memoirs of prominent military leaders, is anything said about these battalions, and in the Soviet military encyclopedia it is said about penal units only in general and in relation to the armies of other countries. Even we, who were directly related to these military units, were then strongly advised by the relevant authorities not to talk about them. It must be said that our 8th Separate Penal Battalion of the 1st Belorussian Front was first openly mentioned only in 1985 - in an essay by I. Rudenko, a columnist for Komsomolskaya Pravda. And in 1995, Russian television correspondent Alexander Afanasyev, in a series of TV programs dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Great Victory under the general title "My War", revealed in detail the essence of the fighting of our penal battalion.

Nevertheless, publications continued to appear (especially in the "perestroika" years), in which either insufficiently informed or biased authors who succumbed to the then fashion to slander our military history, presented these unusual military formations in general terms, not finding differences between front-line officer penal battalions and army penal companies.

However, despite their common affiliation with the concept of "penal", and, perhaps, the assignment of particularly difficult combat missions to both of them, these were completely different military formations: they were not similar, primarily in composition (penal battalions consisted of offending officers, penal companies - from privates and sergeants, and often from criminal elements transferred to the front from places of detention), as well as by organization, level of combat skills and combat experience.

About the features of the use of officer penal battalions in battles, about some details of their regular organization, weapons and what I had to endure during my stay in such a penal battalion, I tell in this book. What

led me to start working on it? All the post-war years, I still hoped that out of the many fighters of penal battalions (they were created 1-2 for each front, and there were fronts: Belarusian - 3, Ukrainian - 4, Baltic - 2, and even Leningrad, Karelian, etc. .d.) there is someone who can truthfully, more or less in detail, on the basis of factual material, tell about these unique formations of the Great Patriotic War, as if from the inside. But, alas ... My fighting friends in the penal battalion (and, first of all, my

wife Margarita, who went through the last miles of the war with us since 1944) for many years pushed me to this difficult, responsible work - to write my memoirs about the war for contemporaries and descendants . And now, apparently, time itself ordered me to take up this necessary and important, in my opinion, business. Especially now that many of my comrades are gone. My duty both to their memory and to my conscience, which is still rebellious on many occasions, forced me to write this book.

It is so important to preserve the history of our entire heroic generation now, when it, this history, is sometimes so shamelessly, tendentiously distorted, distorted by some, if I may say so, historians, writers, and simply temporary workers who seek to make capital on a sensational half-truth in a literal and figurative sense. this word.

In my rather long years of life in general (I will soon be 80!) and 40 years of military service in particular, many events have fallen, many meetings with people, including very famous ones. My main goal is through the people with whom I was confronted by circumstances, through the events that filled my life, to show that difficult, but truly heroic time, which now remains only in the memory of representatives of our, alas, outgoing, generation of winners.

Attempts to invade this area of \u200b\u200bthe history of people who did not boil in hellish cauldrons, which were the penal officer battalions, and sometimes simply set themselves the goal of deliberately distorting the history of the Great Patriotic War, create misconceptions about the penal battalions, which take their place in that history and played their own (precisely his own!) role.

Since we did not keep diaries (for the officers of the front line, to put it mildly, it was "out of hand"), the most difficult thing that at first seemed to me generally insurmountable was the flaws and lapses of memory, insidious memory, which over the years has lost many details of events, the names of villages and the cities in which they took place, the names and surnames of the fighters and commanders with whom I had a chance to live side by side and survive that hard times. And to all this, there is also the inability to turn to the military archives, now found themselves in another state (I mean Russia, since my place of residence is Ukraine). Therefore,

my immeasurable gratitude to those who helped me to restore in memory much of what was forgotten. First

of all, these are my fighting friends, with whom I was lucky to share the fate of officers who, by the will of fate, ended up in a penal battalion without being penalized, with whom I drank plenty of front-line life and who were able to significantly enrich the material included in this book with their memories.

This is one of my closest front-line comrades - Valery Zakharovich Semykin, now a retired lieutenant colonel, living near Voronezh and suffering severely from the consequences of a deep stroke, but, despite this, he found the strength to send me very important information that he remembered about our life on front. This is Pyotr Ivanovich

Zagumennikov, also a lieutenant colonel who until recently lived in Poltava, but, unfortunately, ended his earthly journey 2 days before the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. Shortly before that sad day, he managed to send me dozens of pages of his own memories of the first days of creation and the first combat deeds of our penal battalion, when I was not yet in it.

My countryman and comrade-in-arms Alexei Antonovich Afonin, who lives near Novosibirsk, gave me great help with his letters (despite the blindness that befell him). These are my

other brother-in-arms friends, who, unfortunately, were not destined to see the books they so persistently persuaded me to work on when we met on the "round" anniversaries of our Victory and whose priceless memories formed the basis of this work.

And their names, dear to my memory, mentioned by me in the description of hostilities and front-line life, these names could rightfully be among my co-authors. I will never forget General Filipp Andreevich Kiselev, officers Vasily Korneevich Tsigichko, Moisei Iosifovich Goldstein, Alexei Grigorievich Filatov, and many others, who have already passed away, including those who are still alive, whose names the reader will find in chapter X of this book.

It was fate's will that it was during the days when I was working on this book that I met a retired major Semyon Emelyanovich Basov, who was still in 1943 in our 8th OSHB a penal fighter. He landed there as a military engineer of the 3rd rank after escaping from German captivity in order to atone for his guilt, although he did not surrender, but fell into captivity due to circumstances beyond his

control. I can't imagine if I could have restored the dates of the events, the names of many cities, rivers, lines of defense and offensive, if, in addition to the testimonies of my fellow soldiers, I had not used the memoirs of such famous personalities who went down in the history of World War II as marshals of the Soviet Union G. K. Zhukov, K. K. Rokossovsky, generals A. V. Gorbatov,

P. I. Batov, S. M. Shtemenko and many others, as well as official reference military-historical literature.

The Kharkiv Historical Museum, especially its employees Valery Konstantinovich Vokhmyanin, Valentina Anatolyevna Sushko, Olga Leonidovna Penkova, gave me invaluable help in searching for data on the events of those years, on the commanders under whose banners we had a chance to fight, on weapons and military equipment of the Great Patriotic War.

My good, already post-war friends Boris Nikolaevich and Alevtina Andreevna Zharekhins from Belarus, as well as my cousin Stanislav Vasilievich Baranov, a retired Soviet officer, helped me to get topographic maps, according to which I was able to restore the chronology of events and "tie" them to the real area. , for many years, even before the collapse of the USSR, who worked in Poland and Germany and knows these countries well. To all

these people and organizations, my sincere and immense gratitude. I express my special gratitude to the interregional

public organization of the society "Knowledge" of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region, its chairman Sergei Mikhailovich Klimov, Antonina Vasilievna Ruzha, editor Galina Alekseevna Kapitonova and the entire editorial and publishing team headed by Albina Ivanovna Sergeyeva, without whose kind assistance this book could and not come out.

I defined the main thing in my work on this book as follows: by adding my memory to the memory of my fighting friends, to create a more or less integral, but truly truthful story about what we happened to see, experience and feel both in the penal battalion and in that one, already gone, an era in general.

There is nothing invented in this book, no artistic conjectures, and for involuntary inaccuracies in some dates and names, geographical and topographical flaws, the reader, I hope, will forgive me. Of course, my life in the

penal battalion cannot be separated from everything that preceded it, and from how it influenced my subsequent military service and life in general. Therefore, in the course of the presentation, I had to make excursions to the "pre-final" time of military service, and even in my childhood, because all this shaped views, consciousness, and worldview, which in one way or another manifested themselves in a combat situation. Yes, and I wanted to somehow shade those moments that somehow contributed to the emergence of that same Soviet patriotism (which many modern literates humiliatingly call "soviet"), which ensured the victory of our people in the holy war, which has already become the history of the last century. Moreover, many "truth seekers" have appeared who, for some reason,

seek out only the negative in the entire difficult military history of our country. These political shifters, and those simply lost in history, distort, and more often try to slander and vulgarize the history of a truly great war and our Motherland. However, the truth that the highest form of crime is betrayal of the past will never cease to be true.

Those who set out to mutilate the truth of the past sow in the minds of those who came to us to replace generations a certain nihilism, disbelief

in the heroism of the Soviet people, their high patriotism, shown in the years of mortal danger hanging over the Fatherland. How beautifully

the poet Yaroslav Smelyakov answered them: I do not

want to be silent now, when

other guardians and

this way and that pity us,

the then inhabitants of Russia.

Perhaps the youth of my days,

having pulled the soldier's belt

tighter, was no better than all

the others. But certainly

not worse. We have managed

to become more literate,

we have become more

tolerant and smarter, and we

will not allow lamenting over our proud youth. It is natural for a person

to be nostalgic for the time of his youth. My work on the book is also

nostalgia, but not so much for the time that fell on our military youth, but for

that high love for the Motherland, which helped us overcome incredible

difficulties, precisely for the love of that Fatherland, for which my fighting

friends were killed, those penal officers with whom I happened to share their

difficult front-line fate, and my brothers, and millions of Soviet people who

selflessly loved their Motherland. And this will not be taken away from us

until the very end.

And I also want to complete my introduction with verses, but written by

my son Alexander as an appeal already to my children, to a very young

generation: Freeze, listen, look, kids,

holding your breath, becoming doubly

sensitive: after all, you are the last girls

and boys who are destined hear about the

war

from those who themselves endured it all,

who saw death, but won...

CHAPTER

1 Where we come from. under repression. Features of military training at school. The beginning of the war. My first political commander. Military school, lieutenant. On the border. Direction - front. Ufa.

Why in the penal

battalion? I'll start with my family tree. At first glance, this may be of little interest to the modern reader, but to characterize the era in which the worldview was formed

of our generation, and mine in particular, still, I think, has a certain value.

I was born at the end of 1923 in the family of a railway worker on Far East, in one of the districts of the Khabarovsk Territory.

Our house was so close to the railroad tracks that when a train passed, it always trembled, as if it was also about to set off on a long journey, and we got so used to this proximity and noise that when we moved to a new house, more distant from the railroad tracks, we for a long time they could not get used to the seemingly unnatural silence.

My father, Vasily Vasilyevich Pyltsyn, was born in 1881. Kostromich, for some reason (he spoke about this very reluctantly and vaguely), either from gendarmerie persecution, or from an unsuccessful marriage, fled to the Far East and even changed his last name, which he previously had, I think, Smirnov. By that time, my father was a fairly literate person

who had an extensive library of classics in the house and a multi-year filing of the pre-revolutionary Niva magazine. For all my childhood memory, he was a railroad foreman, and then a road foreman on the railway. Basically, he was a master of all trades. The intricate domestic furniture and much of the metal kitchen utensils, all kinds of wooden barrels and casks for various pickles and piss were made by his own hands. In the family, he was so strict that we children were afraid of one look from him, although he never used a belt and did not raise his weighty hand at us. Despite

his extensive social activities, especially in the field of defense circles such as "osoaviakhim" and others, he was always non-partisan. In 1938, for the negligence

committed by his subordinates in organizing work to replace a broken rail, which almost led to the collapse of a passenger train, his father was sentenced to

three years in prison. Came out of confinement to the very start

Patriotic War. He had a strange feature of talking very loudly to himself and somehow, without witnesses, frankly spoke negatively about the fact that "Hitler swindled all our" brilliant "leaders", the main of which (i.e. Stalin) simply "slept through Russia" . (Here, for ethical reasons, I replaced one letter in my father's phrase.) Someone heard this, denounced him to the right place ("snitches" then there were many), and the father, in accordance with the then procedures, was repressed: exiled from the Far East somewhere then to the North or to Siberia, where his trace disappeared.

My mother, Maria Danilovna, was younger than my father by as much as 20 years and came from the family of a simple worker-traveler, a Siberian, a true Russian (as they said then, "chaldone") Danila Leontievich Karelin.

My maternal grandmother Ekaterina Ivanovna (maiden name Smertina) came from Khakassia. (Grandfather said that he stole her from the neighboring Khakass village). Both of my mother's parents were illiterate (however, grandmother Katya was able to count money surprisingly dexterously and almost

by touch.) And my mother, who did not know how to read and write, but who remembers a myriad of well-aimed folk proverbs and sayings, was taught to read and write by me, becoming a first grade student, although I have been reading fluently and confidently for a long time, from the age of four or five. At my insistence, she began to attend the educational program, and I "supervised" her. Mom quite successfully mastered the basics of literacy, began to read not smartly, but confidently, and really with difficulty - to write. She didn't have the time or patience for more. However, this literacy was enough for her to, with the outbreak of the war, when the male population was "cleaned up" by mobilization, to master the position of an operator of an automated turnout checkpoint at the Kimkan station of the Far Eastern Railway, where she worked for more than one year after the end of the war, earning government medals "For Labor Distinction ", " For Valiant Labor in the Great Patriotic War" and the highest

professional award - the badge "Honorary Railway Worker". Before the war, our family did not belong to the category of the rich, but even the difficult, hungry year of 1933 we survived without tragic losses. Basically, we were fed by the taiga. Father, an avid hunter, supplied us with game. I remember th

taiga with a gun and brought one or two hares, then several squirrels or wood grouse, and we were, in general, provided with meat. Moreover, my father worked and sold squirrel and hare skins, buying flour and sugar with the proceeds. In addition, in the autumn he took a short vacation and went to the same taiga to harvest pine nuts. He brought it home in bags, adapted with his own hand-made press to press excellent "lean" oil from its grains, and the remaining cake was used by my mother to make "cedar milk" and additives to bread, which she baked from a small amount of flour mixed with barley, which was then available on the open market. and acorn "coffee" and oatmeal. The family tradition also saved us from making various preparations of

wild fruits, mushrooms, and plants. These preparations saved us not only from starvation, but also from the scurvy that was then raging in the Far East. From childhood we were accustomed to picking berries and mushrooms and knew them well. Mushrooms were collected and dried in large quantities - boletus, mossiness mushrooms and the main mushroom - porcini! For salting they took large white milk mushrooms, mushrooms and chanterelles, but we had a special mushroom delicacy - whites and volusushki ...

The Far East is not rich in fruits, but berries !!! In the nearest taiga, we found strawberry glades, honeysuckle bushes, entire thickets of raspberries, a tart oblong, large green-ripe berry (locally, "raisin"), wild grapes, and even mountain ash and bird cherry, and away, from the so-called "berry marey" brought full tues of blueberries, lingonberries, cloudberry. Just as far in the spring they went to collect wild garlic, this wild-growing broad-leaved garlic, a real storehouse of vitamin C, the main "doctor" from scurvy.

Father and grandfather were also engaged in fishing, but not with a bait, but with the help of the so-called "muzzles", or heads woven from willow twigs for catching fish. And almost every evening my father went after work to the nearby flowing stormy, icy river to pick up the catch. Sometimes he brought a "trifle", and during the spawning run of salmon - and red fish: pink salmon, chum salmon or coho salmon,

some specimens of which reached 6-8 kilograms (in this case, we also had red caviar). And all this was boiled, and fried, and salted, and dried. And in general - everything went to the table ...

Our family was not religious. My father, in my opinion, was always an outspoken atheist, although he supported, rather, not religious, but ritual holidays. Mom also treated these holidays with respect, but nevertheless, we never really observed either small or "great" fasts. But on Shrovetide they baked a huge number of pancakes, on Easter they dyed eggs. And when in the 30s they opened stores with the strange name "Torgsin", in which they bought gold, silver products and all kinds of jewelry made of precious stones from the population in exchange for white flour, sugar and other shortages, then mother first of all she took down gold pectoral crosses there and only after that other, who knows what rich jewelry, leaving herself her favorite tiny gold earrings. And during the years of my active atheistic "activities" in the so-called SVB (Union of Militant Atheists), we children, with special zeal and rapture, staged a lot of "godless" performances for adults. That's when, at my request, my mother, without much resistance (and with the approval of my father), removed a large icon of the Mother of God hanging there from the "red" corner and gave it to my grandmother.

In total, seven children were born in our family, but three died in early childhood (which was not uncommon at that time), and four of us survived before the start of the war: my two older brothers, my younger sister and me. I tried several

times to compile a genealogical tree of our family, but my father never initiated us into his genealogy, and I never learned anything further than my grandfather Danila and grandmother Katya on the maternal side. Yes, in those years it was somehow not customary to look for one's roots: you never know what you "dig up". But on the side branches, I was well acquainted with other children and grandchildren of the Karelins, who lived not far from us. This is my mother's brother

Pyotr Danilovich, also a road foreman, a communist, who in 1937 quite unexpectedly fell under a repressive skating rink and disappeared without a trace somewhere in the vast expanses of the Far North. He left behind a sick wife and five children who managed to learn and survive the war; many of them are still alive today.

I must honestly say that the arrests and searches for "enemies of the people" at that time infected many, including us, younger schoolchildren.

(I remember, for example, how we, students of the 2nd-3rd grade, at the prompt of some teachers, looked for supposedly disguised inscriptions, like "Down with the CPSU (b)", and if they did not find, that means "poorly searched"). But the sudden arrests of our loved ones, for whom no one from the environment saw any crimes, we perceived as unfortunate mistakes in such a large-scale case of exposing pests and all sorts of enemies of the people in general (then the well-known proverb "they cut the forest - the chips fly"). But what is surprising: along with this broad campaign of searching for "enemies" there was a powerful

influence on the minds (and not only of young people), instilling love for our system and the ideals of communism. Suffice it to recall only the films and patriotic songs of that time. And this extraordinarily sharpened both that feeling of love for the motherland, and that consciousness of high patriotism with which we entered the holy war against Nazi Germany. The repressions of those years, except for my uncle I mentioned, fortunately did not affect other relatives. So, my mother's

younger sister Klavdia Danilovna (born in 1915), despite her repressed brother, worked as a telegraph operator at a railway junction, at that time in a very responsible position. She married engineer Baranov Vasily Alekseevich, who went to the front from the first days of the war, and after the war became a KGB officer. He worked in this capacity all post-war years in Riga and died in 1970. Their son, my cousin Stanislav, born in 1938, who voluntarily entered the border troops and graduated from the Military School of the Border Troops, was forced to leave Latvia in 1991

As I said, I had two brothers. I was so similar in appearance to the eldest of them, Ivan (born in 1918), that even acquaintances often confused us. So, Ivan was distinguished by versatile abilities: he played beautifully on a variety of musical instruments, surprised everyone with the talent of a draftsman, was considered

gifted in mathematics (his teacher sometimes gave him a "six" instead of "five" for original solutions to problems). By the way, immediately after graduating from 10 classes, he was invited to the post of mathematics teacher in our village seven-year school. In 1937, he was called up for military service in the Coast Guard of the Pacific Fleet, where he successfully served as a teacher in groups for the elimination of illiteracy and illiteracy among the Red Army and Red Navy, while mastering the specialty of a radio operator. In 1942 he was sent to the army and, being part of the 5th Shock Army of the Southern Front, "Guards Sergeant Pyltsyn Ivan Vasilyevich ... in the battle for the Socialist Motherland, faithful to the military oath, showing heroism and courage, was killed on September 18, 1943 years" - so it was written in the funeral. The second brother, Victor,

three years older than me, did not stand out for special talents, unless he inherited from his father (and he looked like him) the manner of talking to himself out loud, especially in his sleep, and he was distinguished by special accuracy and pedantry. After graduating from school, he worked for a year on the railway as an assistant on duty at the station. And then, in 1939, he was drafted into the airborne troops in the Far East. Shortly before the start of the war, the brigade in which he served was transferred to Ukraine, where he happened to meet the first blows of the fascist military machine and experience the bitterness of retreat. During the defense of the North Caucasus, he was wounded, treated in hospitals and died (or rather, went missing) in December 1942, somewhere near Stalingrad.

My sister Antonina Vasilievna (born in 1927) was repeatedly elected to our settlement Council of Working People's Deputies. In 1948, she moved to Leningrad, where she worked with secret office work in one of the city's district military commissariats. ... Until the 7th grade,

I studied at our village school (where I joined the Komsomol), and from the 8th grade - at the railway secondary school in the city of Obluchye, located not far away. In 1938, my father

was convicted of negligence, and my older brother served in the army, and it was impossible for my mother to pay for my education and living in a boarding school with Victor's small salary. Then, on my own initiative, I wrote to the People's Commissar of Railways L.M.

A letter to Kaganovich, in which he told about the difficulties of our family in ensuring my desire for further studies, including the fact that my father, a railway worker, was convicted of negligence.

Soon I, a schoolboy, received a government letter in which, by order of the People's Commissar, I was provided at the expense of the railway with all types of tuition fees until secondary education and boarding at the school, as well as free rail travel to and from the place of study.

I well remember the characteristic signature on the official letterhead: "L. Kaganovich" (I especially remember the large, disproportionately high capital letter "L" (Lazar). So I was provided with studies at the Obluchensk railway secondary school for all three years. As I found out later, the

husband of my aunt Klavdiya Danilovna committed a more desperate act in his childhood. there was a reception with Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, who was then Deputy People's Commissar of Education of the RSFSR. As a result, the People's Commissariat of Education issued an order: "Accept Vasily Baranov to a seven-year school." And then - a technical school, etc.!

It so happened that my sister and I, my cousins and four brothers - the children of my repressed uncle Pyotr Karelin - were raised, raised, and put on their feet by our mothers, who were left without husbands. And glory to them, ordinary Russian women, our eternal good memory.

In contrast to our village school, here after school every day we were engaged in various defense circles, and this was in fact a well-organized military training. We didn't have full-time military instructors, and at a certain time, real sergeants from military units located in the city came to our school or boarding school and trained us in all defense, as they said then, subjects. Some boys, in addition, went to classes at flying clubs, where they learned to fly an airplane and jump with a parachute, which gave them an advantage - after the 9th grade they entered flight schools.

The school's military organization consisted of platoons (classes) and companies (all sibling classes). So, for example, three tenths of the class

made up a company. On the scale of all 8-10th grades of the school, it was a "youth army battalion". Class leaders were platoon commanders, and the most diligent of them was appointed to the post of company commander. The eldest of the 10th grade students was a battalion commander, and when I was elected as the Komsomol organizer of the school in the 9th grade, the position was determined - "battalion commissar". Naturally, the Komsomol organizers of the classes were "political instructors of the companies." And how seriously we took these "youth army" duties! Even according to the "Yunarmy rank", buttonholes with the corresponding army insignia were sewn onto shirts or jackets, they cut out squares ("kubari") or rectangles ("sleepers") from tin and were very proud of it. And they called us, respectively, me, for example: "comrade young battalion commissar." This is how respect for the army was instilled, and even some command skills. We finished the 10th grade in 1941, two days before the date that became fatal for the whole country - June 22, and immediately after the graduation party the next day we went to the regional center (then the city of Obluchye was part of the Birsky district with the center at Bira station) to get into military schools. Then there was a craze for military schools (flight, tank, artillery, etc.), and I chose for myself (taking into account family tradition and out of gratitude for free education) the Novosibirsk Military Institute of Railway Engineers. But all our plans and dreams were immediately broken by the news of the beginning of the war that caught us in the regional center. And immediately, as if on cue, a huge line of people flocked to the military registration and enlistment office, striving to join the ranks of armed defenders as soon as possible.

For two days we, school graduates, were kept in the dark about our applications (I immediately changed my mind and wrote an application to the Tank School), and then they informed us that all military schools were already fully staffed and we were being drafted as Red Army soldiers. We were given two days to collect. We quickly went home and packed our things. We were with relatives for a short time, and soon trains took us to different regions of the Far East.

I ended up with several of my school friends in the train that was taking us west, but our joy was short-lived: in two days he took us only to the city of Belogorsk, in total

three hundred kilometers from the place of conscription, where we all joined the newly formed 5th Army Reserve Rifle Regiment of the 2nd Red Banner Army of the Far Eastern Military District, which has already become known as the front, although not active.

This hastily deployed regiment did not yet have a sufficient number of commanders, and echelon after echelon brought here, it seemed, a myriad of drafted and mobilized. The company in which I ended up

was commanded by junior political instructor Tarasov Nikolai Vasilyevich. I well remember this first commander in my army life, tall, slender, already tired of sleepless nights, but not losing some kind of wise calmness. With only two "head over heels" in his buttonholes (and I wore "as many as two sleepers" at school!), he nevertheless managed to cope with a company of more than five hundred people, mostly untrained people of different ages, most of whom were either illiterate or illiterate in general (such a contingent arrived in the first days of mobilization, especially from taiga villages). Our first company commander immediately singled out those who graduated from

secondary schools, and literally at first glance determined who could temporarily act as platoon and squad commanders (I was assigned the position of platoon commander). And all this mass of people, not yet controlled yesterday, began to gradually organize itself into military collectives. On the second day he took us to the bathhouse (tents with showers). We were shaved bald, we washed and dressed, becoming so identical that we didn't even recognize our friends, not to mention the fact that at first we couldn't decide who was in whose platoon. However, gradually the company took on a military shape. We were assigned to a tent camp, which turned out to be more than 3 kilometers from the

canteen, and all this way, our junior political instructor Tarasov managed to both encourage and teach the marching or marching step, and we, "platoon commanders", tried to help him to the best of our ability. strength and skill. By some miracle, our company commander managed to organize various classes in preparation for taking the military oath, and even had time to conduct personal conversations with many of us. For all my life, Nikolai Vasilyevich Tarasov

remained a model of a real commander and sincere political instructor, and I check many of my actions with him all my life.

... We barely had 5-6 hours a day to sleep, and even less for our political instructor. But a few days later, a lieutenant and a junior lieutenant, mobilized from the reserve, arrived in the company, whom the company commander instructed to "half a company". Soon we were taken to the shooting range and everyone who had somehow completed the rifle shooting exercises was sworn in. There was little solemnity then in this ritual, but everything was remembered to the details. Then we swore allegiance to our Motherland - the USSR. That was the only such day in my life, never again did I swear allegiance to either another government or another homeland. God was merciful. And all 40 years of army service I passed under this only oath in my life. Over

time, we were drawn into this state of continuous, intense training everyday life, and after about a month our company became a more or less well-coordinated military organism, and, as it seemed to us, our commander-political instructor was already proud of how this once amorphous mass of people clearly "hacked" combat step, passing through the streets of the city. Our "half-company" lieutenants rudely but skillfully lifted our spirits and cheered us up with such jokes, for example: "Higher head, lift up your noses and chins! Look how the girls are looking at us!" And such jokes worked win-win!

The time has come, and our company was distributed among the regiments and divisions of the "Far Eastern, strong support," as we sang in our first combat song. And so it was a pity to part with our political instructor, who managed to become a truly father-commander for us. Thank you, Nikolai Vasilyevich, for science!

Further, fate threw me into a reconnaissance platoon of the 198th rifle regiment of the 12th rifle division of the 2nd Red Banner Army of the Far Eastern Front. And here, no longer in the reserve regiment, the physical loads were real, and the relationship was established more seriously and more firmly. The most important commander for me turned out to be sergeant Zamyatin, assistant platoon commander. From him I got my first disciplinary sanction - a "personal reprimand". And it turned out like this. Since I was tall, at physical exercises, which mainly consisted of running, they put me ahead of everyone, even old-timers, that is

"guides". And when the sergeant gave the command "wider step", I really made this step wider with my long legs and accelerated my run, and the "old men" kept pulling me back, they say, you still have time, you run, and I, of course, slowed down. After several such cases, the sergeant stopped the platoon, put me out of action, and announced the same reprimand for not following the commands. I

didn't write home about this penalty, I was ashamed. long i he tried to earn a reprimand, until during one of the thirty-kilometer marches he helped a lagging behind Red Army soldier, took his rifle and literally dragged him by the hand. It was for the shown mutual assistance on the march that the sergeant praised me, removing his reprimand "in public". How glad I was!

I rarely saw the commander of my platoon, Lieutenant Zolotov, I don't remember the regiment commander at all, but the commander of the division, Colonel Chanchibadze, a short, dense Georgian, was well preserved in my memory. We learned a lot from his ingenuity and exactingness. And in general, the

"science of winning" was given abundantly later, when our tunics were so salty that, having removed them, it was possible to put them on (and not put them on) - and they did not

fall! As a child, I had some kind of disease of the knee joint, and for a long time I was treated "for rheumatism" with both hospital and grandmother's ointments. Here, under such incredible loads, this "rheumatism" seems to have disappeared. And still does not make itself known. Many ailments were cured by the army, and not only physical ones. I

served in this reconnaissance platoon until January 1, 1942. On New Year's Eve, I was urgently relieved from my post at the regimental banner (I was on guard duty), and on the same night, without giving me the opportunity to clean my rifle, they sent me on a Komsomol ticket to 2- e Vladivostok Military Infantry School. I was delighted, it was that I would see Vladivostok - the city of my childhood dream, which I had not yet seen, but about which I had heard so much.

But it turned out that this school is located in Komsomolsk-on-Amur. I studied there for only half a year, but I still remember those cold winter months of study with special warmth and with a sense of gratitude - all my teachers, commanders and

educators, starting from the foreman of the company Khamsutdinov, the commander of our cadet platoon, the very young lieutenant Lilichkin, the company commander, senior lieutenant Litvinov, exceptionally smart and surprisingly resistant to almost Arctic Amur frosts.

With reverence, I remember my fellow cadets: Kolya Pakhtusov, Andrey Lobkis, our company leader, able to sing loudly even in severe frosts, always sleepy bespectacled Sergey Vetchinkin. These and many other fellow cadets of mine were those who put their reliable shoulders in difficult times for me, but whom, alas, I was never destined to meet again.

I can't help but remember some of the details.
life in the school and the cadets and teachers that I remember.

It was located on one of the city outskirts, called Mylki, not far from the Amur. The daily routine was very busy. Charging began two hours before breakfast with physical training or bayonet fighting. And this, as a rule, is daily, except for cases when we were alerted at night and taken out into the field by forced marches. There, instead of breakfast, they were given crackers and canned food (as a rule, fish or "porridge with meat" - one can for two).

In the dining room, breakfast usually consisted of buckwheat, oatmeal or barley porridge, a piece of butter, bread and sweet tea. Physically, we were exhausted greatly, and in general, we always lacked (in principle, enough high-calorie) cadet allowance. After all, before lunch, as a rule, classes were outdoors, in the field, where the temperature in January-February often dropped below 30 ° below zero, and after lunch, when it was already getting dark, there were 2-3 hours of classes (topography, theory of shooting, study of the equipment of weapons, mine-sapper training, communications, etc.), and then self-training.

Before dinner every evening for 1-2 hours we did either drill or ski training. Fortunately, the ski route passed not far from the shop. True, there was nothing in it except jars of canned crab that filled all the shelves and display cases, and we bought them quite often. It was our "dop ration", which we either ate immediately upon returning to the barracks, or

saved until breakfast to spice up their morning portion of pearl barley or oatmeal with these crabs. Good combination, let me tell you. It turned out delicious! Lunches were

high in calories. In addition to thick cereal or pasta soup or cabbage soup with meat, which was regularly served as a seasoning, some kind of vitamin supplement (like finely ground rose hips, as a remedy for scurvy), they gave a decent portion of porridge or pasta with stewed meat, or even salted chum salmon or pink salmon ... Needless to say, the Far Eastern Territory is a fish land! However, despite the rather high-calorie diet,

severe frosts and huge physical activity did their job, exhausting, squeezing, freezing these calories out of us. Only those who had the good fortune to go to the outfit in the kitchen managed to eat their fill. Maybe that's why those who received punishment in the form of an outfit out of turn were not assigned to the kitchen (for this, there were mainly soldiers' latrines). The feeling of constant malnutrition evoked (usually during short

smoke breaks) sweet memories of what delicious dishes our mothers and grandmothers spoiled us in the pre-war period. My closest friend at the school, Kolya Pakhtusov (he is from Nikolaevsk-on-Amur) loved to relish how his mother cooked a wonderful stuffed goose on holidays. He even got hit by his comrades, who interrupted him with pleading "Do not poison the soul !!!". A few more details. We especially remember, for example, the teacher of topography, junior lieutenant Elman,

an Estonian called up from the reserve. It was he who taught us to navigate by the stars, to determine the phases of the moon and to calculate to the exact day when the new moon or full moon will come. In fact, my grandfather Danila taught me this wisdom as a child, but with a "theoretical justification" it was done by our school topographer. He was such an interesting, knowledgeable person, able to put the necessary knowledge into our heads, that all of us without exception were looking forward to his classes. He organized practical walking along the azimuth in such a way that, with the correct and less time spent passing the route, we were waiting for some kind of prize like a pack of shag or

cologne bottle. And this, I must say, at that time were very valuable prizes.

I also remember forever the teacher of artillery and small arms, Major Babkin. A wit and a prankster, he never gave anyone a chance to take a nap in class. If someone was feeling sleepy after training in the bitter cold, he was so good at shaking up a platoon or company that general laughter would drive away drowsiness for a long time.

guilty.

He also arranged classes-competitions for disassembling and blindly assembling the Tokarev self-loading rifle (SVT), the Degtyarev light machine gun (RPD), the Simonov automatic rifle (ABC), which was still little known then (compared to the classic three-ruler) and others ...

I stayed at the school from the first days of 1942 until mid-July, when I completed a six-month course of study "in the first category" (that is, "excellent") and, like the other seventeen "first-class" students, received my first officer rank "lieutenant".

They gave us command staff (later they began to be called officer) certificates and equipment (a belt with a harness), a field bag with a planchette (for a topographic map) and a holster for a revolver, which was supposed to be received already in the destination unit. We were dressed in brand new cloth tunics, on which brand new buttonholes with two red enamel squares ("head over heels") were fastened. They gave out trousers with piping, caps with crimson bands, and even chrome boots. And we walked with unusual pride in all this, creaking terribly with new leather equipment ...

However, our joy was overshadowed by the fact that almost all junior lieutenants and sergeants were sent to the front, and all lieutenants - to the troops in the Far East. A small group of graduates, which included me, were appointed commanders of rifle platoons in the 29th Separate Rifle Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Suin. Literally from the first weeks after I accepted a platoon in

one of the battalions of the brigade, located near Lake Khanka on the border with Manchuria, where the Japanese were then in charge, we all began to submit a report about being sent to the Army on the Western fronts. Soon we were gathered by the brigade commander and calmly but convincingly managed to

to prove that our "inactive" Far Eastern Front can quite unexpectedly, at any time, turn into a "very active" one! Winter came. And although it was the

southern part of the Soviet Far East, the frosts were impressive, and in combination with almost constant strong winds in those parts, they became especially unpleasant, so that for ski crossings, which took a lot of time, we were given knitted woolen balaclavas worn under hats with earflaps. holes for eyes and mouth to protect cheeks and noses from frostbite. And yet, by the end of 1942, when, apparently due to the fact that the German troops were stopped

near Stalingrad and the threat of a Japanese attack became less likely, one company from each battalion of our brigade in full strength was reorganized into marching (for the front), loaded into trains and sent to the West in the first days of January 1943.

As it became known later, we were sent to participate in the formation of the Yugoslav army, following the example of the already created divisions of the Polish Army and the Czechoslovak brigade of Ludwig Svoboda. Our echelon did not go to Lake Baikal, or rather, to Zima station, but flew in such a way that at many junction stations the locomotives changed so rapidly that we did not have time not only to get hot food from the wagon with field kitchens following in our echelon, but even grab a bucket of boiling water.

During the change of the locomotive at the Bira station, the station duty officer, well known to me, transmitted to my native half-station, where my relatives lived, the news that I would soon pass by echelon. All my relatives went out to the railway tracks, but the train rushed by at such a speed that I barely had time to see my own, and grandfather Danila, who was trying to throw me a gift - a pouch of tobacco, did not get into the open door of the car. As my sister later told me, grandfather burst into tears for this reason.

At the Zima station, our train was suddenly stopped, and we stood there for almost a week. Something, apparently, went wrong with the formation of the Yugoslav units, and then we were taken so slowly that we reached the capital of Bashkiria, Ufa, for almost a month. Having passed it, at Alkino station at night our entire echelon

unloaded, and we joined the 59th reserve rifle regiment of the 12th reserve rifle brigade of the South Ural military district. In this regiment, our main business was the preparation of new replenishment, mainly from already elderly people (most often from Muslim republics), teaching these recruits the basics of military affairs, and forming marching companies from them for the front. For a long time, almost nine months, I, like many other officers, sought to be sent to the front. Here,

besides the fact that I joined the party and apart from many other events, fate was pleased to introduce me to a girl evacuated from besieged Leningrad, who more than a year later, at the front, became my wife. For life. But this will be discussed later. And then, in August or early September, another of my many reports was given a go, and we, a small group of officers, were first sent to the OBOR (Separate Regiment of the Reserve Officers) of the district, and then to the same regiment, but already of the Belorussian Front. Being in this 27th interrogation of the front, we carried out combat service to protect important objects from possible enemy sabotage, but it was still not the front line where we aspired.

And then one day, in early December 1943, I was summoned to the headquarters of the regiment for another conversation. The major who spoke to me was wearing a sheepskin coat and, despite the hotly heated room, was tightened with belts, as if he was ready for any action at any moment. His face, with the conch of his right ear visibly damaged from above, was weather-beaten almost black. After reviewing my still thin personal file and asking a few questions about the family, about the school and about health, he suddenly said: "Everything is clear to me. You will go, lieutenant, to our penal battalion!" Seemingly stuttering in surprise, I asked, "W-w-what?" And in response I heard: "You are asking the wrong question, lieutenant. Not for what, but why.

As it turned out, it was the chief of staff of the 8th Separate penal battalion, Major Vasily Afanasyevich Lozovoy. I had the opportunity to start my front-line life in 1943 with him, and to meet a quarter of a century after the war at the operational

command gathering of the leadership of the Kyiv military district. Then I was already in the rank of colonel and I recognized him, also a colonel, by his noticeable right ear.

And then, in December 1943, after heavy fighting, in which the penal battalion suffered heavy losses, including in the permanent officer corps, he selected us, eighteen officers from lieutenant to major, mostly already experienced front-line soldiers returning from hospitals to the front line. I was among them alone "not fired upon", which caused me then not so much bewilderment as pride in the fact that I was equated with military officers. Literally an hour later, we were already racing into the

disturbing night in an open car with darkened headlights towards the front line, well defined by flashes from shell explosions, by luminous traces of multi-colored tracer bullets, by lighting flares hanging over the horizon. Somewhere out there, under enemy fire, our 8th Separate (officer) penal battalion, so far unknown to us, but soon becoming native for a long time, until the very Victory, held the defense.

True, I may have less than others, I already had some idea of the penal battalions (at least from the Order of the People's Commissar of Defense No. 227), but how far it turned out to be from the real one! Unfortunately, I do not have the official "Regulations" about them, and the battalion in which I ended up was also, apparently, far from the first organizational and staff documents.

As stated in one of his post-war publications in the then all-Union newspaper "Veteran" No 3 (55) for 1984, the former chief of staff of our penal battalion, Major General Kiselev F.A., who served in it from the first days of its creation until disbanded after the Victory, "the battalion consisted of a permanent and variable composition. The variable composition included those who arrived in the battalion to serve their sentences for committed misconduct" (that is, penalized). By the way, I heard many times that in some similar battalions, when referring to them, and even in documents, the word "penalty" was added to their former military rank (for example, "penalty major"), or in general everyone was called "penalized privates", etc. I don't know whose decision it was. But in

in our penal battalion, apparently in order not to once again emphasize their position, which would hardly have contributed to their re-education, it was customary to call all of them, belonging to the variable composition of the battalion, "variable fighters."

And they addressed their commanders, as is customary in the army, for example, "comrade captain." Further, General Kiselev wrote: "The permanent staff included staff officers, commanders of companies, platoons, their deputies for political affairs, foremen of divisions, heads of artillery, clothing, food supplies, financial allowances and others. The battalion consisted of a headquarters, three rifle companies, a company submachine gunners, machine-gun, mortar and anti-tank rifle companies, commandant, economic, communications platoons. There was also a representative of the "Special Department SMERSH" ("Death to Spies"), and a medical and sanitary platoon with a battalion first-aid post, and others.

My front-line friend in the penal battalion, Pyotr Zagumennikov, who took part in its first formations, wrote to me about this in his memoirs. Then, he wrote, in each company and each platoon, in addition to commanders, the officer positions of their deputies for combat and political affairs (political officers) were also provided. Even Pyotr Zagumennikov himself, then still a lieutenant, who arrived in the battalion after being treated for a wound that he received at the front, being the commander of a rifle company, at first, probably as still very young (under 19 years old), was offered the position

of a castle platoon. He did not agree, and soon these officer posts of deputy platoon commanders and company commanders were abolished. Apparently, such a significant saturation

of the command level and political staff with full-time officers was assumed on the basis that otherwise it would be impossible to manage the penalized in former officer ranks up to colonel. However, as it turned out, this problem was far-fetched, and one "combat" deputy was left in the companies (even without political instructors), while in platoons they were generally replaced by two lock platoon commanders from among the penalized themselves. True, such a reduction in such a number of political workers who had previously appeared made it possible, it turns out, to maintain a relatively

a large political apparatus under the deputy battalion commander for political affairs (as it seemed to me, mostly not on

the case). It was in such a penal (officer) battalion, already "combed" according to the experience of the first

battles, that I ended up. Since I was in the penal battalion only from the end of 1943, I will briefly describe the fighting operations of the battalion until that time from the recollections of the same Pyotr Zagumennikov, who began serving in the 8th OSHB from the very first days of its formation, and from the words of the former penal ward, Major Semyon Basov, who ended up in the first composition of this particular penal battalion and participated in its first battles.

The 8th Separate penal (officer) battalion of the Central Front began to form at the end of April 1943 in the village of Zmievka near the city of Orel. The staff of the battalion administration and its subdivisions was recruited mainly from officers who had received combat experience in the Battle of Stalingrad. The structure of the battalion actually corresponded to a rifle regiment.

The battalion commander (staff category colonel) had two general deputies, the chief of staff and the political officer (lieutenant colonels), as well as a supply assistant; the chief of staff has four assistants (PNSH - 1, 2, 3, 4) - majors. Each company had 200 or more fighters, and these companies corresponded in composition to an ordinary rifle battalion. Thus, in terms of strength, the penal battalion approached the rifle regiment. The regular position of a company commander is a major, and a platoon commander is a captain. By July 1943 (the beginning of the Battle of

Kursk), the battalion was formed and took up defensive positions in the Ponyri-Maloarkhangelskoye region of the Oryol region in the sector of the 7th Lithuanian Rifle Division, where it received its first baptism of fire. In stubborn, fierce battles, the penal battalion defended its positions, broke through the enemy defenses and went on the offensive against Trosna. Thus, the very first battles showed the unparalleled stamina of the

battalion, its ability to conduct a decisive offensive and, despite significant losses, stubbornly push forward. Starting on the Kursk Bulge, his battle path went further in fierce battles across the lands of the Kursk region, northern Ukraine, including the battles for Putivl, and further - to the Dnieper in the region

Chernigov. And only there he was first brought to rest and further formation in the area of the village of Dobryanka.

Having received replenishment, the battalion was transferred to the Loevsky bridgehead area on the Sozha River (Belarus) to expand and deepen it. Having successfully coped with this task, as a result of which the city of Loev was liberated, the penal battalion went on the offensive in the direction of Gomel.

During this period, the Central Front was renamed the Belorussian Front and the battalion became part of the 48th Army of General P. L. Romanenko. With fighting, the penal battalion reached the city of Rechitsa and participated in the completion of the encirclement of the Gomel group of Germans.

After the liberation of Gomel (11/26/1943), the battalion marched through this city, went to the area of the village of Pervomaiskoye, Zhlobin region, and took up defensive positions there on the left bank of the Dnieper. Soon after a two-hour artillery preparation, our troops went on the offensive, and the battalion advanced four to five kilometers. But it so happened that the neighbors on the right and left could not advance and the penal battalion remained with open flanks, which the enemy immediately took advantage of, starting to cut off and surround the battalion. Breaking through the

encirclement, after heavy losses, the battalion was again placed on the defensive, where I arrived with a group of officers from the front reserve. And

everything that happened with me, of which I was a participant or to which witness, I will try to tell in the subsequent chapters of this book.

CHAPTER

2 As part of the 3rd Army. Legendary General Gorbатов. Penalty boxes behind enemy lines. Liberation of the city of Rogachev. Rehabilitation. Ice dome. "Diet" weather. Belorussian Evenings

As we believed then and as it seems now, our 8th Separate Penal Battalion played a rather important role in the liberation of the regional center of Belarus, the city of Rogachev, Gomel region. The fact is that the repeated attempts of our troops at the beginning of 1944 to go on the offensive in this area, to overcome the heavily fortified enemy lines on the Dnieper and Drut rivers, and to eliminate the Rogachev bridgehead of the Germans on the Dnieper were not successful.

As stated in one of the publications on the history of the Patriotic War, "the enemy, given that the loss of Belarus occupied by him, which covered the path to the Baltic states, is fraught with serious consequences for him, continued to keep large forces here and strengthen defensive lines. Then only as part of the German army group "Center" was 70 divisions."

The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945

Short story. Edition 3rd. - Moscow. Military publishing house. 1984, p. 245.

I'll add on my own: the path went through Belarus, first of all, to Poland and East Prussia. And it also had a great meaning.

Then to participate in the liquidation of the Rogachev bridgehead Germans and the capture of the city of Rogachev, and our battalion was brought in.

In the period preceding this event, after heavy fighting near Zhlobin, the battalion was on formation in the village of Maiskoye, Buda-Koshelev district. The replenishment of the battalion went very intensively. And not only due to the offending combat officers. There was also a significant contingent of former officers who found themselves surrounded in the first years of the war, who were in the occupied territory and did not participate in the partisan movement (we called them the general word "encirclement"). There were also a small number of former prisoners of war officers released by our troops from German concentration camps or who had escaped from them, who had passed the appropriate checks in the Smersh authorities ("Death to Spies"). Policemen and other accomplices of the enemy were not sent to the battalion. They were destined for a different fate.

Recently, some of our historians have stated that, in accordance with Stalin's order, all former prisoners of war and encirclement were driven into Soviet concentration camps, all prisoners of war were declared enemies of the people. The fact that our penal battalion was replenished with this category of penalized ones suggests that such statements do not always reflect the truth.

It is known that former prisoners of war - officers who did not stain themselves with cooperation with the enemy, were sent to penal battalions. True, in the majority, not according to the verdicts of the military tribunals, but according to the decisions of the army commissions, which were guided by the order of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command No. 270 of August 1, 1941,

who qualified the surrender as treason. The only trouble was that these commissions rarely distinguished who surrendered, that is, voluntarily went over to the side of the enemy, even in a critical situation, and who was captured either by being wounded or shell-shocked, or by a tragic combination of other circumstances.

And if it was lawful to apply punishment to the former for their guilt before the Motherland, violation of the oath, then the latter actually had no guilt before their people. Here the facts of equating one to the other seem unfair to me. But what was, was. Once, probably, these commissions had to get to the bottom of truth.

By the way, then some part of the guilty military officers were also sent to the penal battalions without consideration of their misconduct or crimes in the tribunals, but simply on the orders of the command of the formations from the corps and above. This decision to expand the power of the commanders of large military formations, perhaps, can be considered justified, but only in individual cases. And in our battalion

at that time, a significant part of the replenishment from the "encirclement" was "delegated" by precisely such commissions, and from regular officers - by the sole decisions of commanders of different ranks. Probably, this was still dictated by the need for urgent staffing of our penal battalion after heavy losses near Zhlobin.

Then the battalion received so many reinforcements that in terms of numbers it approached the composition of a rifle regiment. There were up to 50 people in platoons, companies sometimes numbered up to 200 fighters, and a battalion - about 850 active bayonets, as they used to say then, that is, 3 times more than an ordinary infantry

Zhlobinskaya battalion. Although the offensive operation of the Belorussian Front lasted, as indicated in reference publications on the Great Patriotic War, from February 21 to February 26, 1944, for us it began earlier. On the night of February 18, the battalion was alerted and urgently, leaving all its rear units and the corresponding guards in the village of Maiskoye, made an accelerated march on foot, covering 25 kilometers overnight. We concentrated in the forest closer to the front line in the morning. There they immediately began to give us white camouflage suits, dry rations, gave the battalion a group

sappers and a platoon of flamethrowers. By the middle of the day, we were already on alert, not yet knowing what task we would perform.

And soon we were built. It turned out that in addition to our battalion, there was another large group nearby, however, 4 times smaller than ours, but also in camouflage suits and even with skis. Then we learned that this was a ski battalion. It turns out that the battalion battalion strife. Only here I realized how big our penal battalion turned out to be at that time.

After some very short time, a group of big bosses - generals and officers - drove up to our general formation on "jeeps". It turns out that the Commander of the 3rd Army, Lieutenant General Alexander Vasilyevich Gorbатов, has arrived. And this means that we moved from the 48th Army of General P. L. Romanenko to the 3rd Army of Gorbатов. Tall, stately, this general quite clearly, but somehow not like a general softly, almost like a father, spoke about the essence of the combat mission that we had to perform. I drew attention to the fact that the commander for some reason leaned on a large, strong tree with a knotty stick. I thought he probably hadn't recovered from his wound yet. It was only later that I heard either a legend or a true story about how the illustrious general "taught fools" with this stick. In his brief, very emotional speech, the general said that we were faced with a combat mission of

extraordinary complexity and responsibility in penetrating behind enemy lines and active operations there. And he hopes that we will fulfill this task with honor. And the nature of the task, he emphasized, testifies to the great confidence that the command of the Front and the Army places in such a battalion as ours. By the way, he said that from yesterday, that is, from February 17, our Belorussian Front began to be called the First Belorussian. At the same time, he promised that if the task was completed in an exemplary manner, then all penal fighters who proved themselves to be staunch fighters, regardless of whether they were wounded, "shed blood", would be released from further stay in the penal battalion, restored to their previous ranks, and especially distinguished ones, in addition, will be presented to government awards. The details of this task were explained to us by our battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Osipov Arkady Aleksandrovich. It was tall, gray-haired, with

with a calm face and a wise look, an officer who seemed to us very elderly. And he was less than forty years old. The task was as follows: on the night of February 19, unnoticed by the enemy, cross the front line and, avoiding combat contact with him, go to his rear with a bold throw and reach the western outskirts of Rogachev. And there, in cooperation with the ski battalion, capture the city and hold it until the main forces of the Army approach. We were given three days for all this, on the basis of which ammunition and a dry, far from rich ration (canned food, crackers and sugar) were issued. My reconnaissance platoon was assigned the task of playing the role of vanguard. Probably, we thought, it would be easier for the ski battalion to ski! Personally, deep snow did not seem to me a particularly aggravating circumstance. The impressions of the winter camps at a military school in the Far East were still fresh in my memory. Then, in early February 1942, we, the cadets of the

infantry school in Komsomolsk-on-Amur, had to go to winter camps for 18 days. By this time, the snow, especially in the taiga, was almost to the waist, and the frosts went off scale for 35 degrees. At a distance of 50-60 kilometers into the depths of the taiga,

we made a march in boots with windings, having a pair of felt boots with us in our knapsack, among other things. Upon arrival at the place, they set up a camp of high either cedar or spruce huts (one per platoon). It was allowed to burn a small fire in this hut, so that if possible, especially at night, one could take turns warming up. They put the boots in satchels, put on felt boots. The only trouble is that no more than 5-7 people could fit around this fire, the rest did not get enough heat.

With the tacit consent of the platoon commander, a recent graduate of the Khabarovsk Infantry School, we gradually added firewood to the fire, until the coniferous branches suddenly dried up at the top flared up all at once. A few minutes later, only coals and melted snow remained from the hut. The platoon commander received a serious penalty, and we lost the right to build another hut. So they warmed themselves all the nights in other people's huts, if possible.

There was no time to freeze during the day: either repelling the attacks of the "enemy", then long ski transitions, then taking heights and hills, then marching waist-deep in the snow.

And when these long 18 days were over, they ordered to change into boots. And they, wet after moving to the camp, froze, they had to be thawed by the fire. And then I went too far: I moved one shoe close to the fire, and he shrank from the fire. However, I was not allowed to walk in felt boots, I had to put on a shrunken boot. The big toe in it turned out to be so compressed that during the return trip it got frostbite and its pad even burst. In the medical unit of the school, I was given the necessary assistance and for two weeks I was freed from wearing shoes, and therefore from outdoor activities. But it was all there, in the school.

And here, in Belarus, in our battalion on skis there were only drags for transporting the wounded and even the dead, if any. In case of failure to

capture Rogachev or the cancellation of this task, we had to in the tactical depth of the enemy (up to 20 kilometers), in his military rear, actively disrupt enemy communications, their communications, blow up bridges through which Nazi troops could pass, smash headquarters. With all these actions, we had to disorganize management, prohibit the approach of reserves from the depths, and, if possible, disperse or destroy them. The main thing was to sow panic and divert the attention of the German command from the front line, where a more successful offensive of our troops was finally to begin with the task of eliminating the enemy bridgehead on the Dnieper and liberating the city of Rogachev. As was customary then, this event was timed to coincide with February 23, Red Army Day, as a gift to the Motherland for this holiday. Well, since it was impossible to take awards,

party cards and other documents with you to reconnaissance, and even more so behind enemy lines, they were urgently deposited with the battalion headquarters and the political officer's office, remaining on this side of the front.

I didn't have any awards yet, but I also turned in my officer's certificate and candidate card. This procedure in the battalion took several hours of the rest of the day. Then there was a hearty lunch, combined with dinner, and a rest, which we remembered with special feeling all the time we were in the German rear.

In his memoirs "Years and Wars", General Gorbатов wrote about this, calling all of us "skiers" due to the long

years of censorship. At 18

o'clock they had a hearty dinner and went to rest. Only two battalions had a short rest. At 23:00 they were raised and they went to the west. This consolidated detachment of skiers had a responsible task: to cross the front line and break into the city of Rogachev that same night.

Our battalion was led by its brave and experienced commander, Lieutenant Colonel Osipov, to carry out this difficult, and indeed unusual, task. And he was a local native, a Rogachevite, and besides, an avid hunter and fisherman, proceeding along and across the entire area adjacent to the Dnieper. Therefore, he knew very well the places where it was possible to quietly approach the positions of the Fritz, overcome their barriers and cross the front line.

Until now, I never cease to be surprised how our battalion commander managed to lead almost the entire huge battalion so skillfully, albeit through a terrain well known to him, but occupied by the enemy. The battalion commander accurately pointed out to the army sappers who ensured our transition the place where they cut a link of barbed wire between two stakes with scissors, unnoticed by the Germans.

And this place turned out to be so well chosen! The moonless night covered us very well. It seems that the army command specifically chose the time for the actions of our battalions

during the onset of the new moon. Although the Germans periodically hung "lanterns" on parachutes, as they called their flares at the front, but the tough preliminary briefing, army ingenuity and the desire to survive made everyone freeze, not move while these "lanterns" glowed. Well, our white camouflage suits made us almost invisible. Of course, this was also facilitated by the confidence of the Germans in the reliability of their defense, which dulled their vigilance. Moreover, along the entire length of the wire fence, they hung a large number of empty cans, which rattled if the wire was touched well.

And almost the entire battalion, not noticed by the Germans, crawled into the

narrow passage! This was for me, in essence, the first real baptism of fire, although in defense I already looked at something. Maybe,

therefore, many details of this transition and, moreover, of actions in the German rear, I remember quite well. Sometimes

the Germans shot through some especially dangerous places with their machine guns on duty. And I remember, for example, that while crossing the passage in the wire fence, I felt some kind of blow. It was only in the afternoon that I discovered that a bullet had pierced my soldier's bowler hat, strapped to a knapsack ("sidor", as they were called then). True, why we took these bowlers with us, if, due to the nature of our combat mission, we could not use them, it used to be incomprehensible to me - just in case, probably. But later I realized that a soldier always needs a bowler hat. The

battalion's column was closed by the company of Captain Matvienko, who arrived in the battalion together with our group and already had significant combat experience, as evidenced by two Orders of the Red Star. And then one of his fighters, through negligence, touched the wire, caught on its thorns and, trying to break out of their tenacious grip, "revived" this tin-can telegraph, which alarmed the Fritz, and they opened the increasing density of the rifle-machine-gun fire in this area. By that time, the advanced units of the battalion had already overcome the first trench, in which there were almost no enemy soldiers (they were warming themselves in dugouts and dugouts), and those who were in the trenches were taken by surprise and removed without firing. Now we also had to reveal ourselves in order to divert the attention of the Fritz jumping out of the dugouts and help our own in trouble. Everyone who was close, practically without anyone's command, opened fire on the Germans, and a platoon of flamethrowers fired several powerful jets of fire at the clusters of Germans and at the exits from the dugouts. For the first time in my life I saw burning and madly screaming people! A creepy sight...

Matvienko's company suffered losses, but nevertheless also broke through to the main forces of the battalion. In the units that had overcome the front line earlier, there were no losses at all. Here the battalion commander set another task for my platoon to close the battalion column. Thus, the platoon turned from the vanguard into the rearguard. This seemed to me more responsible, since now the platoon had to operate already away from the battalion command, and my decisions should become more independent.

The Germans did not understand with what forces the Russians passed through the sector of their defense, and perhaps that is why in the future, when faced with any of our units, the Fritz shouted in panic "Rus partisan!" And, as we later learned, this panic

theirs was not unfounded: more than 350,000 partisans operated in partisan detachments and brigades on the territory of Belarus. In what sector

the ski battalion crossed the front line, I did not know, and during the hostilities behind enemy lines we had no contact with skiers.

Apparently, either the nature of their task or the prevailing situation forced this battalion to act independently. Only later, when our unusual campaign behind enemy

lines was completed, an army newspaper reported that "this unprecedented raid was boldly and boldly carried out by Osipov's detachment and Kamirny's ski battalion." It became clear that the skiers also successfully completed their task. Our battalion acted independently. after the defeat of some large German headquarters in the village.

Madora and blowing up several rails on the same railway, only by dawn on February 20 did he begin to approach Rogachev from the northwest, cutting the fork in the highway to Bobruisk and Zhlobin. And only many years later, from the "Soviet Military Encyclopedia"

I learned that the skiers were from the 120th Infantry Regiment of the 5th Infantry Division and they crossed the front line a day later and in another place - north of Novy Bykhov. And a day later, as a result of a bold maneuver, one separate regiment of the same division went there. Having united, they cut the Rogachev-Mogilev railway and intercepted the Rogachev-Novy Bykhov highway. The enemy grouping was isolated from the north. Even after this raid, we learned about the ski battalion only from

short correspondence in the army newspaper.

By the way, in my memory, this was the first and last publication about the penal battalion, although disguised: "detachment" (maybe some kind of partisan?). Neither before, nor after, and until the very end of the war, the penal battalion was never mentioned anywhere. Neither cameramen, nor photojournalists, nor representatives of

journalistic fraternity, even from divisional newspapers. Probably, a "taboo" was imposed from above on the coverage of the actions of the penalty box.

So even after the war, we did not look for ourselves, like others, in newsreels and documentaries about the war. But our children, whom we took to watch such films, asked if they would see us there. We somehow answered these questions. We got out.

And then, in February 1944, as soon as our battalion reached the area close to the northwestern outskirts of Rogachev, the battalion commander contacted the army headquarters by radio. Here is how this event is reflected in the memoirs of General Gorbатов:

Received news from the combined team of skiers. He reached Rogachev, but just before the city, the sent reconnaissance met with the enemy, who had settled in the trenches. The detachment commander did the right thing: realizing that surprise had been lost, he did not get involved in an unequal battle, but led the detachment into the forest and began to operate behind enemy lines.

Yes, even if we tried to take possession of the city, and even more so - to keep it, we would not succeed. After all, the main forces of the Germans were not defeated, and we had neither artillery, nor armored vehicles, nor even mortars! Our mortar company, under the command of Major Pekur, which included my friend Misha Goldshtein, acted as a rifle company in this raid. And a company of anti-tank rifles and a platoon of knapsack flamethrowers in

these conditions was clearly not enough! After all, both in Rogachev itself and near it, the Germans had a large number of troops and

technology.

Soon the command "to act" was received, as was foreseen in advance - to smash the rear, which we actively engaged in. We managed to sow a great panic in the camp of the enemy. The battalion acted both in groups and gathering into one, rather powerful fist. Our small groups destroyed enemy equipment. The captured guns, having previously killed their servants, turned in the direction of noticeable concentrations of enemy troops, warehouses, etc. Among the penalized were artillerymen, tankers, even pilots, so it was not difficult to fire a few shots from the guns. Then these guns and mortars were blown up or rendered unusable in another way. They set fire to captured food warehouses and

ammunition depots, took control of road junctions, destroyed suitable enemy military reserves and cut lines of communication. Temporarily taken prisoner ("temporarily", because after interrogations, of course, they were not released, but destroyed), the Germans said that their command believed that a division that had come from somewhere, or even two, and many partisans were operating in the rear. Thus began our operational operations in the rear. "The

skiers blocked all the roads leading from Rogachev to Madory and Bykhov, including the railway, thereby depriving the Nazis of escape routes and pulling up reserves." This is how Commander Gorbатов assessed our actions.

One of the episodes was the liberation of the inhabitants of Belarus driven into slavery. It seems that on the second day, closer to noon, our advanced units noticed that on the way to the west the Germans were escorting a large group of men and women with the aim of deporting them to Germany (we already knew about the mass deportations of the able-bodied population into slavery). The battalion commander decided to recapture his countrymen from the Germans (our commander, as mentioned earlier, was from these places). The German convoy was relatively small - 15 people, and literally in minutes it was finished. We freed about 300 Soviet citizens whom the Nazis forced at gunpoint to dig trenches in the frozen ground. At our command, all the liberated rushed in all directions to hide in the forest or go to their villages. However, as the commander of a platoon in the rear guard, that is, in the rear guard of our large column, I noticed that a group of six women was following us relentlessly. Of course, in terms of their clothes, this group was already very noticeably different from us, dressed in white camouflage suits, and, of course, could unmask us. I had to explain this to them more than once, but, alas, always unsuccessfully. They followed us until dusk. They were afraid to fall into the clutches of the Germans again. WITH

At nightfall, I again explained to them that now they could leave behind us under the cover of night and quietly return to their villages. It seemed that at last my "explanatory work" had an effect on them. However, as soon as dawn broke and our movement resumed, I was informed that some strange group of people was moving behind us. I thought, did the Germans get on the tail?

Looking closely, we were surprised to recognize our "old acquaintances", but, strangely, dressed in some kind of camouflage. It turned out that, taking advantage of the darkness, in the cold, stripping naked, they took off their underwear, and then, dressed in their simple zipuns and fur coats, they pulled their underwear over them, and some of the short fur coats, which had white or just light fur inside, were turned inside out. and in such a "disguised" form they appeared before us. And it was a pity for them, and it was impossible not to laugh! We had to put up with their resourcefulness and let them follow us for some more time. Soon, movement towards Rogachev was detected by a large convoy of Germans. A fight ensued, and this women's "department" was blown away by the wind! I must say

that the column of our battalion was built in such a way that both machine gunners, anti-tank rifle units (PTR), and flamethrowers followed in its head, and in the main composition, and in the tail. The latter were armed with "ROKS" unfamiliar to us - knapsack flamethrowers with liquid "KS" (for some reason, now, after many years, this liquid, self-igniting in air, is called the "Molotov Cocktail", then we had no idea about such a name). When a German convoy was seen, the battalion froze, and as soon

as the front vehicles caught up with our trailing units, heavy fire was opened on the Nazis from all types of weapons we had.

At the tail of our column was a PTR platoon under the command of 19-year-old, but already having solid combat experience and wounds, Senior Lieutenant Pyotr Zagumennikov, with whom I managed to make friends. His fighters managed to knock out the two front cars leading the German convoy. And this whole considerable cavalcade of cars turned out to be locked on both sides on a narrow road, limited from the sides by deep, loose snow, since the cars closing the convoy had also already been hit by armor-piercers who were at the head of the battalion column. Having fallen under heavy fire, the Fritz, who managed to jump out of the bodies of cars, rushed in a panic in different directions. Some of them, distraught, rushed in our direction, towards the lead whirlwind of machine gunners and submachine gunners of the battalion. Most of the Germans shouting "Rus

partisans!" rushed in the opposite direction from the road and was finished off by the penalty boxers catching up with them.

One of the Germans, deftly rushing from tree to tree, I could not get fire from a machine gun, probably because in the heat of the moment I shot "from the stomach", without aiming. And then, pulling out his revolver from the holster, he carefully aimed and from the first shot, at a distance of about a hundred meters, he nevertheless laid it down! It was my first personal "trophy" ... Instead of the planned two

or three days, our raid lasted for five. During this time, several more enemy foot and horse-drawn columns were defeated, moving towards the front line, and one night they defeated the headquarters of some German division, blown up several bridges on the road approaching Rogachev from the west. were set on fire by the "Rocks", and for a long time the echo of the explosions reached us. In general, the battalion acted so actively that by the beginning of the fourth day almost all the ammunition for machine guns and

machine guns had been used up. An order was received: for each machine gun to leave NZ (emergency reserve) for 10-20 rounds, but many soldiers no longer had this amount!

The battalion commander reported on the course of our actions to the headquarters of the Army on radio. He also reported on the almost complete expenditure of ammunition

to small arms. There, apparently, they decided to drop a certain amount of cartridges on us by parachute. And when in the second half of the day two "maize", as the small two-winged U-2s were then called, flew up to the indicated square, German anti-aircraft installations suddenly started talking. To our surprise, it turned out that at night neither we nor the Germans noticed that our battalion ended up in that part of the forest that the Nazis had chosen to place one of their anti-aircraft batteries. The pilots, correctly assessing the situation, quickly turned around and flew away. And our flamethrowers managed to reach the sound of shots and literally incinerate both the guns and the servants. It's good that they gave us a flamethrower platoon! By the way, he rescued us once again, when already at the end of the fourth day a large foot column of the enemy was noticed. Flamethrowers practically destroyed this column as well.

Of course, we could not carry the equipment that the Fritz threw with us, we took only machine guns ("Schmeissers"), and light machine guns, and of course, pistols, mostly Walthers and Parabellums. So many already had two machine guns - their own and a trophy one, although both had a very small supply of cartridges. The rest of the trophies, as best they could, were rendered unusable, and with the food captured from the Germans, as far as possible, they replenished their meager dry rations, which were almost gone. We were especially surprised by the trophy bread, sealed in a transparent film with the marked year of manufacture: 1937-1938. How many years was stored, and you could even cut and eat frozen! Do not compare with our crackers. The same surprise caused us some kind of hybrid of ersatz honey with butter in large briquettes. Sandwiches from this bread with such honey butter were very welcome and turned out to be quite

hearty.

In food trophies there was also a lot of chocolate, which also well reinforced our forces, completely weakened from physical and nervous overexertion. There were many unforeseen and unexpected things, but we had

almost no losses. The wounded, who could not walk, and several dead, among whom was the party organizer of the battalion, Major Zheltov, who died while pursuing a group of Germans who were fleeing from that large convoy, were transported on drags. He was a wonderful person (a former teacher in a rural school) and a political worker of rare sincerity. Such,

unfortunately, in my long army service and in the war, and in the post-war period, were quite rare. I can't remember everything now, but suffice it to say that for all these 5 days and nights we could not warm ourselves anywhere, except for some people who managed to do it

shortly at the burning headquarters and warehouses, blown up or set on fire. But what kind of "heating" was it, if it was necessary to leave immediately, so as not to incur a response from the Fritz. I also had to sleep in fits and starts, and only when the battalion stopped moving for some time at night. Many managed to sleep on the move, which was familiar to me from the military school. I didn't even dream of hot food.

On the fifth day, the battalion commander gave the order not to engage in battles unless absolutely necessary, to save cartridges. Finally, the troops of our 3rd Army went on the offensive and began to move forward. Under these conditions, we had to disguise ourselves so that the German units retreating en masse would not find us, almost without weapons.

At one of these moments, machine guns crackled in the distance, and cannon shots were heard. One of the penalized, probably in the past an artilleryman, shouted to one of the deputy battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Ivanovich Kudryashov, who happened to be nearby at that time: "Comrade Lieutenant Colonel! That's forty-five hitting! Probably, ours are already

advancing!" The lieutenant colonel decided to check the assumption of the penalty box, sent him and another fighter as either scouts or truce envoys. They very carefully began to move in the direction of the shooting. Time seemed to have stopped. Then we already knew about the "Vlasovites" and the "Bulbovtsy" ("Bulbovtsy" in Belarus is almost the same as the "Benderites" in Ukraine). There were fears that we would suddenly run into them, but we have no

cartridges! And so we soon see that our parliamentarians are being led towards us under escort, not by Vlasov or Bulbovites, but by several Soviet officers and Red Army soldiers! Our joy knew no bounds! Everyone jumped up and rushed to them, to ours, to their own. It turned out that they, too, had suspected us of involvement in the same treacherous troops. The

hot hugs are over. The command of the battalion spoke with the officers of the units we met. Soon we were introduced to the course of the combat situation. Our 3rd Army and its neighbor, the 50th Army, nevertheless broke through the German defenses (albeit 2 days later than planned) and have already captured Rogachev. The 3rd Army then cleared a bridgehead from the enemy on the left bank of the Dnieper along a front of 45 kilometers and a depth of up to 12. At the same time, as indicated in the book of General Gorbatov, the army lost only a few people wounded, who were blown up by mines. Here is how the general himself writes

I have always preferred active action, but avoided the futile loss of people. That is why we tried to make full use of surprise in every bridgehead; I

I always personally followed the course of the battle, and when I saw that the offensive did not promise success, I did not shout "Come on, come on!" -

and ordered to go on the defensive. It so happened that only from Gorbатов's memoirs did I learn these details. And then we still did not know that on February 24, 1944, Moscow saluted the troops of the Army in honor of the liberation of Rogachev from the yoke of the invaders. And the reason for our ignorance was that the batteries of the radios were discharged, and there was no communication with the army headquarters for the last days. We did not know then that the 2nd Belorussian Front was formed. It included part of the troops of our 1st Belorussian, but we were very glad that our penal battalion remained in the latter, with the illustrious General Rokossovsky, who soon became a marshal.

Moreover, the following event was still fresh in the memory of many. Immediately after the heavy fighting near Zhlobin, when the battalion suffered heavy losses both in the variable and command staff, Rokossovsky himself, the Front Commander, visited the trenches of the battalion. How many were the impressions of those who were lucky enough to talk with him! Literally everyone admired his manner of speaking calmly and kindly both with the penalty box and with their commanders. I could only regret that I had not witnessed this.

This truly unparalleled raid of the penal battalion behind enemy lines has ended. And there were no detachments, as many detractors of our military history speak and write about, but there was a belief that these former officers, although guilty of something before the Motherland, remained honest Soviet people and were ready to atone for their courage and heroism their guilt, which, it must be said, they were basically fully aware of.

We were immediately taken not far to the rear and placed in the huts of several nearby villages. Exhausted, deadly tired, many, not waiting for the approach of field kitchens with hot food, fell asleep on the go right in front of the huts.

To our great chagrin, we were already here overtaken by the loss of several people. On the stove in one hut there were 3 penalties, they fell asleep before they had time to take off all their military weapons. One of them, apparently, had an F-1 grenade - "lemon" on his belt, and, probably, because he, turning in his sleep, tore the grenade from his belt, it exploded.

Only one of these three managed to be sent to the first-aid post, and two died. To endure such a load, such trials and die after the battle, on the eve of their complete liberation ... For the successful

completion of the combat mission, as the Army Commander promised, the entire variable composition (penalty boxes) was, as they would say now, rehabilitated, many were awarded combat awards: Order of Glory III degree, medals "For Courage" and "For Military Merit". These were heroes, from whose exploits the guilt attributed to them was subtracted, but even after that there was also enough for rewards. I must say that the penalty box was not happy with the Order of Glory. The fact is that it was a soldier's order in terms of status, and officers were not awarded them at all. And, of course, many wanted to hide their stay in the SB as privates, and this order was evidence of this.

The command staff of the battalion was basically awarded orders. My friend Petya Zagumennikov received the Order of the Patriotic War II degree. The then commander of the commandant's platoon guarding the battalion headquarters, Filipp Kiselev (by the end of the war he had already become a lieutenant colonel, chief of staff of the battalion) was awarded the second medal "For Courage". By the way, among the commanders of the battalion, the medal "For Courage" was regarded as a high award, approximately equivalent to the soldier's Order of Glory. The company commanders Matvienko and Pekur received the Order of the Red Banner, and this order was considered one of the main military orders. All, unfortunately, do not remember. Yes, do not list.

And I and several other officers this time were bypassed with awards. We probably haven't shown ourselves enough yet. But soon, by order of the Commander of the Front, General Rokossovsky, I was awarded the rank of "senior lieutenant." I took this as a reward. We, platoon

commanders, urgently wrote references-relationships for all the penalty boxers, on the basis of which both the release of the penalty boxers and their rewarding took place. And our battalion commander Osipov presented the battalion officers for awards.

In the matter of awarding, much, if not all, depended on the command. Here, General Gorbатов freed all the penalized who were in the rear of the Germans, regardless of whether they atoned for their guilt with blood, or were not wounded, but simply fought honestly and bravely.

I am talking about this here because there were other army commanders, in which the battalion had to perform combat missions of different complexity and danger. However, the reaction of many of them to the award was very different from Gorbatov's. So, the Commander of the 65th Army, General Batov Pavel Ivanovich, with any successful action of the battalion, decided to justify only those penalized soldiers who died or were wounded out of action. And Lieutenant Colonel Baturin, who had already come to us in Poland as a battalion commander instead of Arkady Alexandrovich Osipov (for some reason my memory did not retain his name), was very sparingly presenting company and platoon commanders for awards and at the same time waiting for which order he would be awarded personally, so that, forbid God, no one can be presented to a higher reward.

Returning to the time we wrote the combat characteristics for the penalized, I will say that these documents, after the signature of the company commanders, were handed over to the battalion headquarters. They already made lists to be released. The path of these papers lay further through the army headquarters to the army or front-line tribunal, and from there to the front headquarters. Orders for reinstatement in officer rank were signed personally by the front commander. Award lists were compiled separately at the battalion headquarters.

While this bureaucratic process was going on (it could hardly have been accelerated!), the battalion again redeployed to the village of Mayskoye Buda, Koshelev district, from which it went behind enemy lines. The people welcomed us very warmly. The main treat in Belarusian huts was bulba (potatoes) with various kinds of pickles and moonshine from

the same bulba. The local girls were happy to meet the fines and officers who returned healthy. After all, our fighters-variables, as we officially called them, were, although temporarily demoted, but still officers, literate and with a fairly high level of culture. By the way, they were not cut bald, but kept normal officer hairstyles. They left good memories for all segments of the population. We must also remember that the people from time immemorial pity those offended by the authorities. Namely, they were like that in the eyes of women and girls, this basis of the population of the front-line villages. Well, the command staff of the battalion, in

Most of the officers aged 20-25 years, of course, also enjoyed great success.

Our rear, weapons and ammunition, warehouses, staff documents, as well as party cards sent here and awards of officers who commanded penal wards remained in this village. There was also a certain number of penalty boxes left to guard all this. And during our "business trip" to the German rear, many new

convicts were added to stay in the penal battalion. And since the liberation of Belarus was under way, the contingent of the penalized was growing, including from among the "encirclement" who at one time found themselves in the occupied territory. Well, the combat situation at the front, some failures that preceded the offensive, probably increased the number of those convicted for failure to carry out combat

tasks.

This, in particular, is indirectly confirmed by the materials of reference books on the history of the war. For example: By the end of

February 1944, the troops of the Belorussian Front captured Mozyr, Kalinkovichi, Rogachev, crossed the Dnieper and captured a bridgehead on its opposite bank. They were not able to occupy Bobruisk and launch an offensive against Minsk, as was required of them (bold mine. - A.P.).

The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945

Short story. - Moscow. Military publishing house. 1967. S.

334. In any case, replenishment has already arrived in place of those subject to release from punishment to form new units of the penal battalion. And the rehabilitation of the recovered penalists, which then lasted several days, had not even begun yet, but two new companies had already been formed.

The rehabilitation procedure consisted in the fact that several groups of representatives from the army and front tribunals and the front headquarters who arrived in the battalion examined our own characteristics in the presence of platoon or company commanders, removed our official convictions, and restored them to military ranks. Along with this, decisions were made on the return of awards and the relevant documents were issued. After all this, the officers restored in all rights were sent, as a rule, to their own units, and the former "encircled" - to the regiment of the officer reserve, from

which, by the way, I recently arrived with many of my now comrades-in-arms. Some of the

penalized "encirclement" still had the old military ranks, for example, "military engineer" or "technical quartermaster" of various ranks. Then they were assigned new officer ranks, however, mostly a step or two lower. The same rule was often used in the troops during recertification for new ranks. Unfortunately, this time I did not have a

chance to participate in the procedure of "cleansing" them of guilt before the Motherland, since in the newly formed two companies the places of platoon commanders had to be taken by me and other officers who had just returned from the Rogachev raid. Probably, I ended up here, rather, as having actually only one real baptism of fire and not yet received enough combat experience (I had other thoughts about this, but more on that later). And these two companies were given the task of seizing a bridgehead on the Drut River from the Germans. To do this, it was necessary to covertly cross this river over the ice at night, without artillery preparation and shouts of "Hurrah!" completely suddenly attack the enemy in the direction of the village (I don't remember its name), drive the Germans out of the first trench and, developing the offensive, ensure that other army units are brought into battle from the captured bridgehead.

On the Drut River, as General Gorbатов noted, the first line of defense of the Germans was especially strong, 6-7 km deep with three positions ... The width of the river was up to 60 meters, the depth was 3.5 meters. Swampy, slightly freezing valley up to one and a half kilometers.

The night was almost moonless and overcast. But the Germans, apparently not expecting our offensive or for some other reason, did not use their lighting "lanterns" at all here. Unlike the Dnieper ice, the ice on this river was fairly beaten up and had to be groped for with feet so as not to fall into the polynyas formed by the explosions of shells and mines. Maybe this state of ice so calmed the Germans that they did not illuminate the nearest approaches to their trenches. Although mortar fire on the ice they occasionally conducted and now. However, as luck

would have it, I happened to take an ice font here. After all, it managed to fail me on beaten, but slightly soldered ice in the cold. I went there right away, and my attempts to get out of this "hole" were unsuccessful for a long time,

because the ice that I was grasping consisted of small ice fragments, barely caught by the night frost, and easily crumbled in my hands. And the current pulled more and more water-swollen trousers and a quilted jacket, which is why my natural buoyancy decreased catastrophically with every second. And if we add to this

that I did not know how to swim at all, then the inevitable consequence of all these dramatic circumstances could be the complete end of my front-line, and not only front-line, life. This deficiency of mine was often reflected in my post-war certifications, which indicated my insufficient physical development, although I skied well, ran crosses, jumped long, high, and shot perfectly.

What saved me then was that an orderly was constantly walking nearby. The urgency with which the platoon was subordinated to me did not make it possible to reliably remember either the surname or the name of this soldier. And you should! Seeing, or rather, hearing my floundering in the water and unsuccessful attempts to get out of the icy crumbling, he, remaining on solid ice, guessed to lie down and crawl as close as possible to the edge of this ill-fated hole. I clung to the front sight of the machine gun he held out. He slowly pulled me to the edge of the hole. Finally, breaking off its fragile edges, with the help of my savior, I managed to get out onto solid ice. We crawled the rest of the way along the river. Yes, it turns out we are not alone.

In the meantime, an ever-increasing firefight began on the shore. It was ours, having swooped down on the enemy like snow on their heads, started a fight.

As General Gorbатов noted, the German defense on the Drut River was powerful. There were also pillboxes with metal caps, and dense minefields, and wire in three stakes. But there was no minefield in our sector, and the wire fences were weak. And this is another evidence that the commander in any situation sought to avoid unjustified losses. Yes, and intelligence did a good job with him, discovering the least fortified section of the German defense. The orderly and I and several other groups who shared

the winter "bathing" with us reached the trench when it was already captured by ours and cleared of living Fritz (there were many corpses in the

trench, and behind it). In some places, the penalty box pursued the fleeing German soldiers and in some places even broke into their second trench.

I, soaked to the skin and chilled, as they say, to the very bones, tried to somehow warm up at least with energetic movements, but in vain. A pipe helped me a little, which I had been smoking for quite a long time, even before the front. It was massive, solid capacity, with a classically curved shank and kept warm for a long time. My tobacco was soaked, and my neighbors in the trenches kindly offered me. This pipe warmed my hands well, but the rest of the body began to lose mobility due to the rather strong frost that lasted all night and all day. My water-soaked clothes gradually turned into a shell of ice. My legs and arms, except for my fingers, which were warming themselves from the tube, had practically lost their mobility, only my head was still spinning quite freely around my neck. My boots soon became ice blocks, and I feared that my feet would get frostbite worse than a finger during a winter trip to the school. The company commander, Major Syrovatsky, seeing that I was of little use, ordered two lightly wounded penalists

to take me to the battalion first-aid post. They dragged me, like an ice deck, again through Drut, back.

In the battalion first-aid post, which was located in a tent with a stove, our doctor was operating - Captain Stepan Petrovich Buzun, short in stature, with an old-fashioned beard (probably no one, even the penitentiaries, did not call him by his military rank). He and his assistant, Lieutenant Vanya Demenkov, cut the icy clothes and boots on me with sapper scissors, pulled it all off me, and then vigorously rubbed everything from head to toe with alcohol. Of course, they poured a solid dose of alcohol inside, dressed me in everything dry and even shod me in warm felt boots. Since the tent was full of wounded, they dug

a hole next to the tent in deep snow, covered the bottom with coniferous spruce branches and covered it with part of the cape. Having put me there, they covered me with the second half of the cape, "insulated" it from above with spruce branches and ... covered it with a thick layer of snow, leaving a hole for air to enter. Well heated and alcohol rubbing, yes and

internal "compress", I almost instantly fell asleep like a dead sleep.

In the morning I got out of my "lair" with the feeling of a well-rested and again full of strength and energy of a person. I didn't even get a banal runny nose, common for such hypothermia, not to mention pneumonia or some kind of bronchitis. As the omniscient Stepan Petrovich later explained to me, this was the result of the mobilization of the body's internal forces, which arises precisely in conditions of deprivation and overstress. And even, as I found out later, during the war people got sick less often and more easily with infectious diseases, not to mention the fact that no epidemics occurred at all. In my case, probably played a role, in addition, my Far Eastern hardening, both from childhood and received during the period of military service there. By the way, as I found out later, Stepan Petrovich is a former penal fighter who remained in the officer cadres of the penal battalion after rehabilitation. For some reason, it was not customary to talk about this in the battalion, although I knew several such cases and treated these officers with great respect. While I slept in my snowy lair, our units completed their task and even managed to advance to the village, where the rifle regiment was introduced into the breakthrough. As I was later told,

this entry was provided by a powerful volley of Guards mortars, called "Katyushas". And so, either one unit of the penalty box moved forward more successfully than the others and the mortar guards did not have time to report it, or someone in the Katyusha battery made a mistake in the calculations when preparing data for firing, but several rockets exploded in the immediate vicinity of penalty boxes. Unfortunately, this did not go without losses among our fighters, but, as eyewitnesses of this incident said, it became clear to everyone why the Germans were so afraid of Katyusha volleys.

Here I break the chronology of my story somewhat. For the 50th anniversary of the Victory in 1995, Russian television prepared a large series of programs under the general title "My War". My wife and I, a front-line nurse who went through all the last miles of the war with me in the penal battalion, by the will of fate were elected participants in these programs and invited to film on television in Moscow, since the authors of this series were familiar with our military fate from

essay by Inna Rudenko "Military field novel", published in "Komsomolskaya Pravda" for the 40th anniversary of the

Victory. As a result of conversations with some of the participants in these programs, from Marshal Yazov to privates, the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper published extensive materials about their combat

everyday life. Amazing truth about the war! But let's go back to February 1944. After the infantry regiment was brought into battle, our units were withdrawn to the battalion's location. Unfortunately, this offensive did not receive further development due to the stubborn resistance of the enemy.

We heard about the wide crossing of the river Drut, which I remember, only at the end of June, when Operation Bagration began, which marked the transition to the complete liberation of long-suffering Belarus from fascist occupation. The participation of our battalion in this historic battle will be discussed in detail below.

In the meantime, those who returned from Druti and the new replenishment urgently loaded onto the submitted cars and departed for the area east of the city of Bykhov. Apparently, the participation of the penal battalion in the expansion of the bridgehead in this direction was envisaged (these were only our assumptions, since we had no official

information on this). Despite the fact that it was already the beginning of March, nature broke out with such a powerful "snowfall" (the snow did not fall, but fell for several days) that as soon as we arrived in the designated area, all the roads and access roads became simply impassable, and not just impassable. And for a whole week we were even cut off from our battalion rear. As our wits used to say, the weather then was "dietary". For almost a week, due to the fact that it was impossible to bring food, our daily three-time hot meal ration consisted of snow melted in camp kitchens (that's what there was no shortage of!) And the "broth" prepared from it, which, in addition to boiling water, contained quite rarely found fats and some inclusions from American pork stew (1 can per company!), We then called the "Second Front". Breadcrumbs were added to this. And there is no way to spice up this "dietary" dish with something.

After the cessation of many days of snowfall and the clearing of roads, including by tanks, the planned offensive was apparently canceled, and we were again taken by cars, but not to Mayskoye Buda, Koshelev district, but to the neighboring village of

Gorodets. The period of our stay in the 3rd Army of General Gorbатов was already ending. Perhaps, until the very end of the war, we had a strong impression of what a sincere commander he was. They even talked about the fact that he, like Rokossovsky, treated the penalty box as a human being because they themselves were once unfairly deprived of their freedom. Well, that's just guesswork.

Probably, it is appropriate here to cite either a true story, or a legend about General

Gorbатов. It was said that after the capture of Rogachev across the already broken and fragile ice of the Dnieper, sappers urgently built a temporary wooden bridge for the crossing of troops and light equipment. By its width, it allowed the movement of equipment only in one direction, and therefore Gorbатов's order was given to the commandant of the crossing to let through vehicles with ammunition, food, artillery and other light equipment in the first place and only towards the

front. When many cars accumulated at the crossing, going to the front line, a considerable number of them also gathered on the other side, including several "jeeps". The commandant of the crossing, a strong and tall major, following the order, did not let them on the bridge. After all, for this it was necessary to stop the flow of cars to the front. General Gorbатов got out of one of the "jeeps" and demanded to let his car through immediately. The major, referring to the order, refused to do so. Angry at the disobedient commandant, the general suddenly hit him with his well-

known stick. The major's reaction was extraordinary: he turned sharply and hit the general, who, rather from surprise, lost his balance and fell over the low railing of the bridge into the snow. What started here! Several officers jumped out of the commander's car and the "jeeps" accompanying him. Some rushed to lift the general, others, drawing their pistols, grabbed the major and twisted his arms.

The general, shaking off the snow, went up to the major, ordered him to be released and ordered to bring his flask. The entire army knew that their Commander did not, under any circumstances, drink alcohol or even smoke. Alexander Vasilievich mentions this feature more than once in his memoirs. After reading them, I learned that it was in his youth that he made a promise never to drink, not smoke or use foul language. And he kept his word firmly. During the war, when he was reproached for his lack of companionship, he said that he would only drink on Victory Day. And only then did he really allow himself to drink a glass of red wine. Therefore, the order to bring "his flask" caused no less surprise among those who watched this scene than everything that preceded it. Gorbatov

personally unscrewed the lid-glass from an unusual flask, filled it with vodka, brought it to the stunned major with the words: "Well done, Major! Drink, consider this as my apology and personal reward. Continue your service, and there will be no real reward." This is an unusual legend about General Gorbatov, but I so wanted to believe in its reality. Or maybe not a legend at all, maybe

it all happened? After all, a person with a good soul and good deeds.

As for his professional qualities and military leadership, it is not for me to judge. But here is what Marshal Rokossovsky writes about him:

Alexander Vasilyevich Gorbatov is an interesting person. A brave, thoughtful military leader, a passionate follower of Suvorov, he put swiftness, surprise, throws over long distances with access to the flank and rear of the enemy above all else in military operations. Gorbatov behaved like a Suvorov in everyday life - he refused all amenities, ate from a soldier's boiler. It seems to me

that the raid of our battalions in the rear of the Germans and our military operations there confirm what has been said. Too bad we didn't have to fight under him anymore. ...

Upon arrival in Gorodets, for a long time we were engaged in receiving reinforcements, forming, arming and knocking together units. Combat training was established, the main goal was to train former pilots, quartermasters, gunners and others

specialists to fight as infantry, which means to make strenuous marches, crawl, dig in, overcome trenches and ditches, as well as conduct well-aimed fire from machine guns, machine guns, anti-tank rifles, and even from captured Faust cartridges. But perhaps the most difficult, especially in psychological terms, was to overcome the fear of some trainees before throwing combat grenades, especially F-1 grenades. The lethal force of its fragments remained up to 200 meters, and even a trained person could throw this hand-held projectile only 50-60 meters. The training took place on combat (not training!) Grenades that explode for real! True, they had to be thrown from the trench. But not everyone was able to overcome the fear and not immediately.

This period of formation and training lasted until mid-May. Naturally, during this time, closer relations and ties with the local population began. And not only with the locals. It turned out that an airfield was located not far away, and the BAO (airfield service battalion) was based near it, the main soldier of which were girls.

I remember one warm spring day, suddenly on the road, almost in the center of the village, an explosion thundered. As it turned out, it was the thawed earth that had exposed a long-standing German anti-tank mine. And a horse stepped on it with a hoof, carrying a whole wagon of artillery shells. It is amazing how they did not detonate, otherwise the charioteer would not have escaped with a simple wound. Of course, this explosion caused a commotion, but as a result, our camp kitchens at the expense of the dead horse were able to increase the calorie content of soldiers'

dishes. In general, for such a long time of our stay in Gorodets, there were dates and dances in the evenings. Often, when dusk approached and combat training stopped, on someone's initiative, choral singing was arranged in a large hut. A song at the front, if there is a place and time for it, and even not on command, somehow especially penetrates the souls and purifies them. And how selflessly they sang at such moments! After all, there were no conductors or choirmasters, but tenors and basses, first and second voices, appeared from somewhere, and they sounded so harmoniously, so powerfully and polyphonically, even almost professionally, that locals gathered inside the hut and

residents and listened to these impromptu concerts with tears of gratitude. They didn't sing

Belarusian songs, they only knew the dance songs "Lyavonikha" and "Bulba Buina, Bulba Fractional". But the Ukrainian ones about Doroshenko and Sagaydachny with their "Viysky Zaporizsky", and about "Green Guy, thick little one", where "the water glistens like a slop", and even "Oh you Galya ..." have always been in the repertoire. But most of all, the thoughtful Russians loved, for example, about Yermak ("The storm roared"), in which the words were uttered with some special feeling: "and the squad, formidable in battles, fell without drawing their swords ..." More often than others, they sang their favorite Chapaev song well-known film ("You will not achieve prey, black raven, I'm not yours"), and especially - "The Tramp Fled from Sakhalin" and "Glorious Sea, Sacred Baikal". Probably, these songs somehow corresponded to the state of mind that the penalty box had ...

For a long time we formed in Gorodets and sang so many songs!

Therefore, when the command was received to urgently load into the railway echelon, one can imagine how many tears were shed, and not only by the girls. The old women, accustomed to the physical help of young, healthy men, also cried, and regretted the loss of the cordiality that had developed in communication with our difficult fighters. ... Loading went smoothly and rather

quickly, so that by evening the echelon had already set off on the restored railway. It turned out that almost from the right flank of our front we had to move to its left flank, that is, to the very south-west of the liberated part of Belarus.

We drove relatively fast, as only the recently restored railroads allowed. I noticed two original methods by which the Germans destroyed the railway tracks.

One - when by some device, like a giant plow, mounted on a platform attached to a steam locomotive and lowered at full speed between the rails, each wooden

the sleeper broke in half like a match.

Another - when, also on the go, with some device, loosely fixed on the head of one rail, the entire track rose vertically, "on the butt" and became like a huge picket fence several kilometers long.

At first we followed through Gomel, Rechitsa, Kalinkovichi. Then our path lay through Ukraine, through Ovruch, Sarny and up to Manevichi. Further, rail traffic had not yet been restored, and we had to walk more than 100 kilometers on foot for three days to the area of the Ukrainian town of Ratno, which was still behind the front line. It turns out that the 1st Belorussian Front, with its left flank, was located in the northwestern part of Ukraine.

There we were placed on the defensive on the Vyzhevka River, where we relieved some Guards Rifle Regiment. The river itself was not large, but its low swampy banks formed a marshy no man's land almost a kilometer wide. The trenches where we were to hold the defense were dug by our predecessors, probably in the winter ...

So we ended up in the 38th Guards Lozovsky Rifle Division of the 70th Army. Now our Army Commander was no longer Gorbатов, but General V. S. Popov. CHAPTER 3 Defense north of Kovel.

How they are blown up by mines. Exposure of "tricks". "Languages". The beginning of the operation "Bagration". Preparing for the offensive So, in the second half of

May 1944, our battalion moved to an area close to the city of Ratno (Ukraine), still occupied by the Germans, which is also to the north of the Ukrainian and also not yet liberated city of Kovel. As Marshal Rokossovsky wrote in his memoirs "Soldier's Duty", "the left wing of the First Belorussian Front ran into huge Polesye swamps." There, in the defense on the Vyzhevka River, we replaced some unit that had been transferred to another sector of the front.

Our 1st company stood on the right flank of the battalion. Captain Matvienko Ivan Vladimirovich commanded the company, and his deputy was an energetic, still quite young (all of us platoon members were then barely 20 years old) Senior Lieutenant Yanin Ivan Georgievich. My platoon was called the third and therefore located on the left flank of the company. To his right, the second platoon

took up defense, led by Lieutenant Usmanov Fuad Bakirovich ("Bashkirin", as he stubbornly called himself, and whom we simply called Fedya. The first platoon was led by Lieutenant Dmitry Ivanovich

Bulgakov. Both of them were 2-3 years older than me and Ivan Yanin.

Despite the relatively long period of formation before this, our units were not fully staffed. This was partly due to the absence at that time of active hostilities in the troops of the front and, of course, in connection with this - a certain lull in the activities of military tribunals. Yes, and "encirclement" has become less. And the defense sector of the battalion was allocated quite a large one, and instead of the authorized 8-10 steps, the fighters in the trenches were no closer than 50-60 meters from each other.

(As reinforcements arrived, these figures, of course, decreased.)

According to

the staffing table, we had two deputy platoon commanders each. They were appointed by order for a battalion from among the penalized, which the company commander and I proposed. One of my deputies was an experienced

commander of a rifle regiment, who had more than two years of combat experience, but somewhere made a mistake in battle, former Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Ivanovich Petrov. In the future, I will not use the word "former". This is probably clear to the reader. After all

they all had some kind of past, but no one knew what future awaited each of them. And at the junction of the past and the future then we were all every day and every hour of the war.

My

other deputy was the head of the division's rear services, who was at fault, also Lieutenant Colonel Shulga (unfortunately, I don't remember his name), he was also responsible for supplying the platoon with ammunition, food and, in general, everything that was necessary for combat operations. And he acted smartly, proactively, with knowledge of the intricacies of this matter.

To be honest, I was flattered that I, still an inexperienced 20-year-old lieutenant, only a platoon commander, had military lieutenant colonels as deputies, although they were former ones. But the main thing was that I hoped to use the combat and everyday experience of these already middle-aged people by my then standards. I appointed an artillery major as one squad leader, a handsome, tall hero with a memorable, somewhat unusual

surname Bubbles. The other squad was commanded by the border guard captain Omelchenko, thin, with delicate features, a quick look and a constant, barely perceptible smile, the third was captain Lugovoi, a tankman with a grenadier mustache, fast on the leg.

Since the time of Gorodets, my messenger to the company commander, and at the same time the orderly, whose duties included taking care of his commander, has become a lieutenant, whom everyone called simply Zhenya for his youth (compared to other penitentiaries). It was a quick, everywhere and everywhere successful fighter. He ended up in a penal battalion due to recklessness on a captured motorcycle: in one village, where their repair unit was located, he knocked down and seriously injured a 7-year-old girl.

The non-staff "chief of staff" (in other words, platoon clerk) was Lieutenant Commander of the Northern Fleet Vinogradov. He was fluent in German, but, oddly enough, it was this knowledge of the enemy's language that brought him to us in SB. Being the head of some division of the naval workshop for the repair of ship radio stations, while checking the repaired radio for reception on different bands, he came across Goebbels' speech. And out of the simplicity of his soul, he began to translate it into Russian in the presence of his subordinates. Someone reported this either to the Special Department, or to the prosecutor's office, and as a result, Vinogradov received two months in a penal battalion "for aiding enemy propaganda." Of course, wartime laws were very strict and this is natural. But here it was rather not the severity of the law that played a role, but the "squealing" that prevailed at that time and the hypertrophied suspicion of some bosses. At that time, random people who made the most common mistakes, miscalculations, without which there is not a single serious business, suffered more from this. It was the rule to find (and in extreme cases, to invent) a specific culprit, the defendant, despite the fact that often not people, but circumstances are to blame. The same thing happened with Vinogradov. And I took him to me in this capacity because he had an almost calligraphic handwriting,

moreover, he could fit as a translator, although I myself knew German relatively well.

The area of defense allotted to us was occupied before us by some kind of guards unit, after which well-equipped trenches remained, and in my area there was also a spacious dugout with three rolls, which already withstood direct hits of several shells and mines. It housed me with my deputies, a clerk and an orderly. The company command post was located on the site of the second platoon in the same dugout. As they immediately announced to us, for some reason there were

no minefields in front of our trenches, but directly behind us, along the entire length of the trenches occupied by our company, there was a mined forest blockage, which we immediately put on our maps. It was a partially felled young forest, littered with camouflaged anti-personnel mines. As it turned out later, some of the mines were PMD-6 with 200-gram thick pieces, and some with 75-gram ones. One section of this blockage, apparently, was mined in the winter. The mines planted here were painted white, and now, already in the

summer, under the yellowed coniferous branches, it was not at all difficult to detect them. And the second part, separated from the first by a well-trodden path, was mined, probably, when the snow had already melted, with khaki-colored mines. It was much more difficult to detect them in grass and needles. I came up with an adventurous idea - to rearrange the mines on the front line of the company's defense, on the strip between our trenches and the river bank, especially since the defense seemed to me "liquid".

There were no sappers in my platoon, and even at the military school I thoroughly studied both my own and German mines (I always followed and still follow the rule: "extra knowledge is never superfluous"). And so I decided to do it myself. I didn't want to endanger one of the penalty boxers who did not know this difficult business, and, strictly speaking, I don't have such a right

had.

Then I somehow didn't think that this mined obstruction was indicated not only on our maps, the maps of the battalion commander and the division commander, but even on the maps of the army headquarters as an important element of defense on an army scale. Of course, the mined area behind our positions was not created on purpose, as a barrier behind

penalty boxes. By the way, under no circumstances were there any detachments behind our battalion, and other intimidating measures were not used. It's just that it's never been needed.

I dare say that officer penal battalions were a model of stamina in any combat situation.

Naturally, I began my "sapper" activity from a site with white mines. He took them off during the day, unloaded them, and at night he put them up, well camouflaged with turf, 30-50 meters in front of his trenches, and always remembered the golden rule that the company commander Senior Lieutenant Litvinov instructed us at the military school: "If you're afraid - don't do it, do it

- don't be afraid". Some mines were unusual for me. In wooden boxes of an ordinary design, instead of thick checkers with a hole for the detonator, flat thick-walled glass bottles filled with powdered TNT melenite were placed, into the neck of which the fuses were inserted. The bottles were wrapped in good parchment paper (this paper turned out to be a very valuable find - one could write letters to relatives on it). My squad leader Omelchenko, whom I recruited as my assistant, quickly mastered the

business of laying mines, and we soon developed a kind of division of labor: I searched, discharged and removed mines in one place, and he installed them in another!

Examining the terrain in the defense area, we found in some small shed something like a warehouse forgotten by our predecessors in the trenches of several dozen unused tension mines. Their official name was "POMZ-2" - "anti-personnel fragmentation mine obstructive." These mines resembled our F-1 hand grenades ("lemons"). They were installed on pegs driven into the ground at a height of 20-30 cm above the ground, wire extensions were removed from the detonators-fuzes, with a sufficiently tangible touch to which the mine worked.

The installation of such mines required special care, thoroughness and accuracy. They posed a more real danger than conventional anti-personnel mines. And yet I decided:

"what good to waste ...", albeit at risk, but I will install these mines! But only himself. I will not trust anyone, even those who have already gained experience in mining Omelchenko, to do this. I'll blow myself up!

Of course, over time, and not without the help of our company commander, a more experienced and older officer, we began to understand that we had no right to remove mines from a site mined by order of senior commanders. And so I persuaded the company commander to report to the battalion headquarters that we were mining the area in front of our trenches only with POMZ trip mines. Unexpectedly, the company commander agreed, but just in case he decided to draw up a detailed diagram of the minefield in front of our trenches, taking into account the setting of all min.

Everything went well while I was working on the site of the blockage with "winter" mines. We managed without incident to rearrange and well camouflage about two hundred "white" mines. And, plus, I managed to install a good half of the stretch mines we found. So a rather dense minefield formed in front of our trenches. field.

It's been about a month since we took up the defensive in this sector. Look around, get used to it. Not far away, just behind the forest blockage, there were thickets of blueberry bushes, which by that time were quite ripe. And many of us, at the opportunity, raided these "plantations", replenishing our bodies with vitamins after a difficult winter. And our rear forces also scouted mushroom places. So mushroom soups were not such a rarity for us. The menu is simply exquisite for front-line conditions! Perhaps, it was here that the rear services really turned around and showed what they are

capable of. Or maybe both the rear of the division and the army suppliers acted so skillfully that nowhere before or later was food organized so well (including officer "additional rations", sometimes even with American canned cheese and canned fish), not to mention about tobacco rations. We, the officers, were brought Belomorkanal cigarettes, and to me, who smokes a very roomy pipe, sometimes even packs of "light" pipe tobacco. The penitentiaries, like ordinary soldiers, were given Morshansky shag, and non-smokers - additional sugar.

And all this made me remember what the problem was with smoking at a school in the Far East. According to the cadet norm, tobacco was not supposed. And almost everyone smoked. Near the school, behind a wooden fence, there was a colony of prisoners. They were given shag. So they sold it to us, for 60 rubles a matchbox. And 60 rubles was the cadet's monthly allowance. And so we shoved money into the cracks in the fence, and they gave us these matchboxes. But they fooled us boys, a terrible thing. In fact, in these boxes of shag there was no more than a pinch, and the rest was small sawdust, crushed dry oak leaves, and sometimes dried horse dung! Holidays were cases when someone received parcels of cigarettes from home. Then each cigarette was smoked in turn by 10-12 people! And the most valuable gift for diligence in the service was a pack of makhorka. ...We were lucky with the weather in Belarus. The

days were hot and dry, and the air was thickly filled with the scent of coniferous trees. If it were not for the nightly enemy artillery attacks and other events related to the performance of combat missions, one could compare our stay here with an unexpected vacation that we got. Not far from the trenches, our commissaries even arranged for us a wash in the field bath and a change of linen not far from the trenches. True, both the pine

forests, which I had to visit many years after the war, and the coniferous aroma always aroused in me some unaccountable fears and revived in my memory what I experienced then, in June 1944, on a mine blockage. This happened even during the "mushroom hunt" in various places in the Soviet Union, from Belarus and the Carpathian Ukraine to the Kostroma forests and the Far East, where my long military service after the war threw me.

However, sometimes the heat was almost African. One of my penalty boxers even had either sunstroke or heatstroke. We quickly brought him to his senses, and I remembered an incident that happened to me back in August 1941 during drills in a reconnaissance platoon in the Far East.

Then it was also a hot sunny day and I, trying to raise my leg higher, suddenly noticed that everything in my eyes began to double, I lost my balance and "fell out" of order. I was picked up, carried into

shadow, doused his chest and head with cold water and forced him to drink steeply salted water. I immediately remembered that in the morning I did not swallow the salt that our platoon commander forced us to use during breakfast before tea. We did it this way: tobacco was blown out of a cigarette sleeve and salt was poured instead. It turned out an impressive length of a kind of ampoule, which we got the hang of swallowing without feeling the salt itself. It turned out that this was a simple but reliable way to prevent heat stroke before hard work or hiking in the

heat. And here, on the Belorussian front, my personal experience came in handy. I ordered all squad leaders to strictly follow the strict implementation of this morning "salt" ritual, so to speak, "salt injection". There were no more cases of heat strokes in the future either in defense or in a grueling offensive. Helped! And at that time, in June 1944, I switched

(appetite comes with eating!) to "green" mines. Finding them has become much more difficult. Somewhere in the second or third ten of these mines, I was unlucky and I ... got blown up on one of them! It happened on June 26th. As I remember

now, by 12 o'clock in the afternoon, having bypassed the trenches and made sure that everything was in order on my defense sector, I, once again well refreshed with delicious Belarusian blueberries (its taste seems to be unique even now!), I went to continue the already almost familiar demining work. This time I managed to remove a few mines, put them on a stump, took a step to the side and, as it seemed to me, flew high into the air from the explosion that thundered under me.

My flight was brief - almost instantly I found myself lying flat on the ground, face down. The first sensation is that the left leg is very baked. So, I think this leg is simply gone. I decided to turn around to see what was left of her. But when he raised his head - stunned! Centimeters in 10-15 right before my eyes - a mine! How did I miss her head?! This is just a miracle. (It was then that the first gray hair appeared in my thick black hair.) Having mastered myself, I already habitually, almost automatically (after all, experience is a great thing: after all, I discharged more than two hundred mines!) Carefully took out the fuse, straightened it to the side antennae checks and began to look around carefully

around. On the side I saw another mine. Only after I discharged it and, turning around, found that my leg was in place, only the toe of the boot was unnaturally turned inward. I tried to move my fingers, I feel - I succeeded. So, the leg is not torn off! Apparently, he stepped on a "small", 75-gram mine. Hearing the

explosion, the leader of the Bubble Squad shouted "Lieutenant, are you alive?" - rushed forward to me. I realized that he might now also run into a mine and yelled at the top of my lungs: "Stop! Don't move! I'll get out myself!" Somehow he got up and, still not feeling acute pain, dragging his injured leg, began to get out along the already cleared part of the blockage to the path. I felt that something was squelching in the boot. Got it: blood. Here is the first wound!

He got out with difficulty. Bubbles and the orderly Zhenya picked me up, dragged me to the dugout, cut me up and took off my boot. They bandaged his leg with an individual bag and on some wheelbarrow, which came from nowhere, was taken to the battalion first-aid post, which was located one and a half kilometers, next to the battalion headquarters, in a village with the original, and therefore well-remembered name Vydranitsa. From there on the same day in the evening, having bandaged me professionally, they took me to the medical

battalion. The dislocation was corrected there (that's when the sensation of pain came to me in full!), the wound was treated and the leg was thoroughly bandaged, with a splint, as in a fracture. However, I had a chance to learn the insidiousness of these mines from glass bottles at once. If large glass fragments, found by touch during the treatment of the wound, were removed immediately, then those smaller ones remained in the leg. They didn't even show up under x-rays. And these pieces of glass that remained in the leg came out of it for many more years after the war ...

After a few days in the medical battalion, I began to walk with difficulty, leaning on a crutch. Soon I replaced the crutch with a stick, which I parted with only two weeks later, already in my unit. After a week of treatment, I somehow managed to persuade the medical battalion authorities to let me go to my battalion. Moreover, the clouds began to thicken over me. Our special officer, senior lieutenant Glukhov, asked me in detail who and when decided to remove mines from

forest blockage. It was necessary to answer for the unauthorized liquidation of this element of defense. And then during my

treatment, the unforeseen happened. My assistant in the field of mines, Omelchenko, who had already gained experience, decided on his own, without me, to continue the installation of POMZs and died when, through negligence, in the dark, he touched the wire he had just cocked mines.

Truly, the miner is mistaken once. So Omelchenko's mistake was the last for him. Friends at the battalion headquarters told me that they were seriously discussing how to save me from the tribunal for this, albeit with good intentions, but deliberate "sabotage" and prevent my transition from the category of commander of the penalty box to the penalty box. As Vasily Afanasyevich, the chief of staff of Lozovoy,

later told me, our battalion commander, then already Colonel Osipov, personally went to the commander of the 70th Army, General VS Popov, to fuss for me. Like, young and green. It is known that in youth a person lights up like dry firewood. This young lieutenant will soon gain experience, settle down and no longer make rash, reckless

steps...

Moreover, it helped me that several Germans were blown up one night on the mines we had laid. They were apparently trying to infiltrate our location behind the "tongue". Probably, for the Fritz, the presence of a minefield also turned out to be here surprise. It has

already been said that the Germans have repeatedly tried to somehow establish which military unit now opposes them on this defensive line. But still, somehow they determined that it was a penal battalion, since a little later, through their loudspeakers, the Nazis at the beginning of each program necessarily turned on our famous song "Katyusha" and even performed in German "Volga-Volga, Mutti Volga", and then they called on the penalized to turn their weapons against their "commanders-oppressors", and, at the same time, they called us the "Rokossovsky Gang". As we knew before, the Germans gave this nickname to our battalion back in 1943, when the battalion, after its creation, entered the first battles on the Kursk ledge as part of the then Central

front, commanded by General Rokossovsky Konstantin Konstantinovich. In their free time

(and it sometimes happened on the defensive), the officers talked with the penalty boxers about combat experience - both their own and the penalty boxers themselves. It was, if you like, something like a refresher course. From the

stories of experienced warriors about the hostilities, I learned that my case of a mine explosion was not so exceptional, something similar with happy outcomes happened to others. So, I remember the story of the company commander, Captain Matvienko, about how a hefty Fritz once ambushed him in an ambush, grabbed him, squeezed him under his arm and dragged him. Somehow Ivan managed to insert his dangling leg somewhere below between the Fritz's legs. He did not expect such a step, fell and for a moment released the prisoner, and Ivan managed to "stab between the eyes" with his boot and run away.

One of the penalty boxers, Major Avdeev himself was in the recent past the commander of a separate penal company (army). It did not consist of delinquent officers, like a company in our SB, but of privates and sergeants who left the battlefield or retreated without an order, simply deserters or marauders, as well as former camp prisoners who were given the opportunity to atone for their guilt at the front.

Avdeev told how he himself was sent to the penal battalion. The company advanced in difficult conditions. During three days of fierce fighting for a large settlement, more than half of the more than five hundred fighters lost. And the foreman and clerk of the company, receiving food after the rest of the company was withdrawn from the battle, "forgot" to report losses and received food for the entire payroll of the company. There was a good supply of American pork stew, and something else, and, most importantly, a solid amount of alcohol. Well, don't give back all that stuff! And the company commander decided, since it happened, to arrange a commemoration for the dead. Yes, at the same time wash the awards that were awarded to the company commander himself, who received the third Order of the Red Banner, and the surviving full-time officers. He invited the army authorities, with whom he had good contacts, including from the intelligence department of the army headquarters, even some officers of the army tribunal and the prosecuto

And soon, for "malicious deceit, which entailed a deliberate overspending of food" (these are not "spikelets" in a grain field for you!), He ended up in the dock and received 5 years in prison with a replacement of two months in a penal battalion. Neither the award just received, nor the presence of representatives of the punitive authorities at the "commemoration" helped. There were many instructive things in these conversations and

stories. Meanwhile, the Germans gradually stepped up their information war against us. They constantly bombarded us with a large number of different leaflets both from aircraft and with special propaganda shells. They also contained calls to surrender (leaflets of the pass into captivity, the so-called ShVZ - "bayonet to the ground"). A lot of leaflets were about the fact that the sons of Stalin and Molotov had already surrendered and everything else, which, of course, we did not believe.

I must say that our special officer Glukhov, and even some political workers, at first very zealously monitored that the fines did not pick up and hide leaflets (especially the passes of the ShVZ). Apparently, they had such an order. But soon they became convinced that these leaflets were disdainful to let penalized even on cigarette rolls, and used only for a certain "need" and cooled down in their zeal. Since they didn't mark me for the Rogachev raid, the thought came to me that I was "passed around" with an award,

perhaps because my father was repressed in 1942 for an unflattering statement addressed to the country's leadership about failures at the front in the first time of the war. Or maybe, I thought, because one of my older brothers, Viktor, went missing at the end of 1942 near Stalingrad. Was he not captured and did he not faint-hearted? Whatever thoughts came to mind then. The time was like this. Yes, and outlook. However, after I hit a mine, got injured,

instead of the expected punishment of unauthorized demining of the blockage in early July, by order of the Commander of the 70th Army, General Popov BC, I was awarded the Order of the Red Star. As our "father" battalion commander Osipov told me when presenting the order, "for decisiveness, initiative and courage in strengthening the defense and for skillful military operations in the battles for the city of Rogachev." So

say "as a whole". Most often, the awards were not for individual fights, but specifically "in aggregate". By the way, in our battalion

commander somehow surprisingly combined laconicism, firmness and severity on the one hand, and kindness, paternal care - on the other. No wonder everyone didn't call him otherwise among themselves, like "dad", "father". So happily for me this mine story ended. Although with mines in

general my "interaction" happened more than once, but always surprisingly successful. In the course of the description of the hostilities, I will talk about this more. This defensive period on the flank of the 1st Belorussian Front was full of other combat

episodes. There were also events that somehow passed by my memory without lingering in it. But almost everything that happened here during the offensive was firmly imprinted in it. The impression of "unexpected rest" was, of course, far from the true meaning of these words. Constant artillery attacks, intense shelling led even then to

serious losses. So, once, during an artillery and mortar raid, a heavy mine hit the light overlap of a dugout under the breastwork, where my friend from the Rogachev epic Petya Zagumennikov, the commander of a platoon of anti-tank rifles, was stationed. Result: three killed, two wounded, and my friend also almost died, escaping with a shell shock, after which he almost did not hear for a long time. Apparently, recognizing my question by the lips, "Why not in the medical battalion?" - answered: "So it will pass!" And it passed.

As I have already said, the Germans tried by all means, including aerial reconnaissance, to uncover our defense system and determine the changes that had taken place in it lately. Above us got into the habit of impudently flying "frame". So at the front, the fascist twin-body reconnaissance spotter "Focke-Wulf" was nicknamed. One penalized machine gunner adapted the wheel of an overturned airplane peasant cart to the rotating turret of Degtyarev's light machine gun and, in the next flight of the "frame" at low altitude, so successfully launched a long line of tracer and armor-piercing bullets into it that the plane "pecked", began to decline sharply and, barely flying over across the river, fell and exploded. The pilot could not even use a parachute.

How much joy we had! And not only because "ours took"! It was joyful in the first place to the penalty box! They knew that for a downed plane or a wrecked tank, they were to be awarded the Order of the Patriotic War! Moreover, without the conditions when medals or orders were awarded for military distinctions, if the feat of a fighter was higher in its value than the grounds for rehabilitation and removal of guilt from him. And for a penal, awarding an order is also an exemption from punishment without spilled blood, without injury.

Unfortunately, there were other kinds of "exploits" of the penalty box. Every day, as already mentioned, the Nazis made powerful artillery attacks on us. Our artillery, as a rule, did not answer them. There was a tough setting for maximum savings in artillery ammunition, and cartridges. We have previously noticed a strange, in our opinion, feature of the notorious German accuracy - to make these raids at a certain time of the day, almost every time after 9 pm. And although by this time everyone was trying to stay, as a rule, in the trenches, they suddenly began to appear among the penalty box, lightly wounded by shrapnel in soft tissues, usually in the buttocks. Well, as soon as the penalty box is wounded, if he sheds blood, then he has atoned for his guilt with all the ensuing consequences. And when the number of such cases became suspicious, our special officers managed to find out the causes and technology of these injuries.

It turns out that during an artillery raid, under the roar of shell explosions, the "inventors" of this method threw a hand grenade into some wooden shed, and then picked out its fragments from its walls. After that, a bullet was taken out and thrown out of the submachine gun cartridge, half of the gunpowder was poured out and a fragment of a suitable size was inserted instead of the bullet. And then - a matter of technology. In the next artillery attack, this machine gun was fired at some soft spot - and they received a "light wound", which means the desired

freedom. True, when this trick was figured out, almost all the "tricks" were caught in the troops and tried again, now for deliberate self-mutilation and actual desertion from the penal battalion. Not all "smarts" returned to SB. Some, taking into account their former "merits", were sentenced to the highest measure and shot. The bulk of the witnesses to these executions met the sentences with approval.

In general, cowards and similar "inventors" in the officer penal battalion were treated, to put it mildly, negatively.

I remember my first days in the battalion. After an unsuccessful offensive in the area of the city of Zhlobin, he suffered heavy losses, including those in command, and stood on the defensive. Naturally, urgent replenishment was required. It was then that our group of 18 officers was selected in the 27th POLL (a separate regiment of the officer reserve) for command positions. And by the end of the war, only three of this group remained in the battalion: me, Misha Goldstein and Ivan Matvienko.

Arriving then in the battalion, I accepted a platoon, and a little later I learned that by order of the Front I had been appointed to the post of company commander. I also thought: well, which of me is the commander of a penal company, if I have not also commanded a platoon in battles. This, in my opinion, absurdity was corrected right here in the battalion. The battalion commander called me and asked if I had any objections if I was assigned to command a reconnaissance platoon. That was my first personal conversation with Lieutenant Colonel Osipov, who struck me with both kindness and some paternal warmth. I was so excited about this offer! After all, in the Far East, I served in a reconnaissance platoon. So something already familiar! By order of the Commander of the Front, General Rokossovsky, this change

was legalized already at the end of March, after the raid on the German rear. Apparently, the Commander was not up to these trifles at that time. But then, at the end of December, in my first days of commanding a platoon in the defense near Zhlobin, I had not yet got used to the peculiarities of the structure of the penal battalion, I did not understand the intricacies of the relationship between the penal officers and the command staff and among themselves. He only drew attention to the appeal of the bosses to their subordinates, including the penalized ones, to "you". And this did not hurt people at all, on the contrary, they felt some closeness in this "you": it means that they consider them to some extent their own. After all, most of them before arriving in SB were in ranks, and even older than many of us. The contingent of penalty boxers ranged from junior lieutenant to lieutenant colonel. And I was struck by one fact, which I will now tell you about.

From the trenches to the company's camp kitchen, one penalty box was walking with a thermos for food. Soon he was caught up by another penalty box, returning

to the battalion headquarters after some document was delivered to the front line. And between them there was about such a conversation. "Kitchen" says "staff": - I

have a good trophy gold watch. Do you want them to be yours? - What, "waving without

looking"? (This was the custom at the front: they exchanged something, clenched in a fist, and only after the exchange it became clear who was the winner.) - No. I will stretch

out my hand, and you will shoot it from 5-6 meters. Only not farther, otherwise you will get to the wrong place, and not closer, so that the gunpowder does not get into

the wound. - Let's! Just show me the clock

first. And when the one who wanted to be wounded raised his hand with the clock high, the

other commanded: - And now, you bastard, raise the other hand too! Yes, higher! I'll show you, you bastard, that not everyone is such

corrupt creatures as you! And so, with his hands up, like a prisoner, he brought him straight to the headquarters to the battalion commander. The battalion commander gave the watch to the "escort", and the penalty box delivered to the headquarters was handed over to the military tribunal. I do not know his further fate. Yes, and this is not the point, but the basis on which the relationship between the penalized was built, and it does not matter what military ranks they were in before they got into the penal battalion - from the "encirclement" or from combat officers. It was important how the penalty boxers themselves treated such tricksters. Rarely did they meet with us, but still there

were. I will talk about some of them in the course of my reminiscences. I can't help telling you about one "outstanding" penalty box who arrived in the platoon when we were on the defensive. I will call his last name somewhat distorted, although consonant, well, for example, Hecht. I do this on purpose. Suddenly, someday these notes of mine will somehow reach his descendants. And they will be ashamed of their ancestor, whom they

considered the hero of that distant war against the Nazis. He arrived at the beginning of July. When my deputies and I got acquainted with a copy of the verdict, a feeling of disgust took possession of us. He was convicted, as they would now say, of sexual harassment and sexual violence in a particularly perverted form.

Being a major engineer, the head of some kind of rear service in a large headquarters, and having created the opportunity for himself to eat separately from

of all, he not only forced the soldier girls who performed the duties of waitresses to bring him food, but also forced them to satisfy their sexual whims during breakfasts and dinners. At the same time, he threatened the poor soldiers that if they refused to comply with his requirements or, moreover, complained to someone, then he would have the power to drive them into a penal company (the girls did not know that women were not sent to penal units). And this was already violence and blackmail. The verdict was severe: ten years in prison with a three-month replacement for a penal battalion. And we thought it was very fair.

Introducing himself to me about his arrival in the platoon, he, seeing my lieutenant stars on shoulder straps, emphatically, even impudently called himself "major engineer Hecht." I had to remind him that he was deprived of his former title and that in order to return it, you need to try very hard. In the meantime, his military rank is here, like everyone else who got into the SB - "variable fighter." At our

"military council" with deputies and section commanders, we decided to send Hecht to the Bubble section, in a remote area. He was warned that always, but above all during the evening German artillery attacks, he carefully watched the enemy in his sector in order to prevent him from approaching the line of our defense or his penetration into the trenches under the cover of artillery fire. They especially noted that the Fritz have been hunting for "language" in our area for a long time. However, on the very first evening, Bubbles reported to me that during the

artillery raid Hecht lay down at the bottom of the trench, covered his head with a cloak with a tent, for which he was beaten by a penal who noticed this. I ordered the squad leader to teach this "sex engineer" a lesson somehow more convincingly. And soon this once again cowardly Hecht was dragged to my dugout by the squad leader and several more penalized men. I understood that my order to "teach a lesson more convincingly" was carried out with a

vengeance. Therefore, I ordered that Hecht's weapons be taken away (no matter what he had done foolishly), and he himself should be put in a separate trench and guarded. It turned out something like a guardhouse.

Until the morning he, trembling with fear and experienced, was kept there, and the next day I had a long conversation with him, from which, honestly

speaking, he did not receive any satisfaction (although not a trace of Hecht's impudence remained). It's just that I've never had to deal with such a pathological coward. I ordered the squad leader to return the weapons to him, but to establish surveillance over him for the entire time he was in the battalion.

After this incident, Hecht stopped hiding during shelling, and it seemed to me that he overcame his cowardice. Then I remembered one of the classics who said that the first, even insignificant, victory over oneself is already, although small, but still a guarantee of future stamina. And I hoped that after this event, if he was not wounded, he would serve all his three penal months in full. True, this assumption of mine was not destined to come true. It should be noted that in this relatively long defensive

period of hostilities, both the supply, the work of the field mail, and all kinds of information were well established. Even the central newspapers Pravda, Zvezdochka (as Krasnaya Zvezda was called), Komsomolskaya Pravda and others were regularly delivered to us, albeit in small quantities, and letters even came from the distant rear (to me, for example, from my mother and sisters from the Far East), although sometimes with a significant delay, but always reliably. By the way, here I received a letter from my relatives, which for a long time settled in my soul the bitterness of loss, that my oldest brother Ivan, whom I was very similar to and who was an example for me in everything, died at the front back in 1943. .. With a mixed feeling, in which there was still more joy than annoyance, we met

the news of the opening, finally, by the allies of the long-promised second front. Three years of waiting - finally waited. If not for two years of excuses and delays, how many lives of our soldiers and Soviet people who died in the occupied territories and in concentration camps could have been saved! And now it was clear to everyone that our advance to the west had become confident and irreversible, and for the Soviet Union there was no longer such an urgent need for a second front as a year or two ago. But... "don't look a gift horse in the mouth." And thanks for that!

It happened, as you know, on June 6th. Then at the front we did not forget that it was the birthday of our great Pushkin. I, of course,

I remembered that it was also the birthday of my beloved, Rita, who, with her hospital, where she served as a nurse, was on the same, 1st Belorussian, front. Letters from her came quickly, so she was somewhere nearby. Yes, we also agreed to deceive the military censorship and informed each other of the places from where we sent letters. We did it this way: in a letter we reported with whom we met or to whom we send greetings, and from the first letters of the names or surnames we made up the name of the location. For example, if I receive greetings from "Sonia, Lena, Ukhov, Tsarev and Kolya", then the hospital is in Slutsk. And the censorship has never figured out our cunning.

The political apparatus also worked intensively, especially in informing us about events in the country and at the front.

We read with great interest the newspapers and the handwritten reports "From the Soviet Information Bureau" handed down to us. The news of the death of General Vatutin, who was mortally wounded near the city of Sarny, reached us, although with a long delay. According to this information, he was wounded by a group of "Benderites" operating on this side of the front line. Then in these areas their gangs and groups of other fascist hirelings roamed in the forests. Quite unexpected, but no less impressive for that, was the report that a huge mass of German prisoners of war, generals, officers and soldiers, were led through the streets of Moscow under escort.

It was pleasant and joyful to learn that the Belarusian partisans stepped up their operations throughout the entire republic and inflicted tangible blows on the enemy. In just one night on June 20, during the "rail war", partisans blew up 40,000 rails. As the head of the transport department of the German Army Group Center, Colonel Teske, later admitted, "large operations of the Belarusian partisans carried out at lightning speed caused in some places a complete halt of railway traffic on all important communications." Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. 1941-1945

Short story. 1984.

Around the same time, we learned about the heroic death of the Guards soldier of the 3rd Belorussian Front, Yuri Smirnov, who was brutally tortured and crucified on the door of the dugout by the Nazis, who did not get any information from him. It shook our

hatred for the Nazis and caused spontaneous rallies with promises to avenge Yura. In our eyes and hearts, he was the same hero as Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya.

Central newspapers reported on the beginning of the offensive operation of all three Belorussian fronts, called "Bagration". Particularly pleasant was the news of the liberation of Zhlobin, in the area where our battalion fought back in December 1943. Moreover, his release took place on a memorable day for me - June 26, when I was blown up by a mine.

Marshal of Victory, as he is deservedly called now, G.K. Zhukov in his book "Memoirs and Reflections" states:

To ensure the Bagration operation, up to 400 thousand tons of ammunition, 300 thousand tons of fuel and lubricants, up to 500 tons of food were to be sent to the troops ... All this had to be transported with great precautions so as not to reveal preparations for the offensive ... Despite the large difficulties, everything was done on time.

And Marshal Rokossovsky, speaking about the preparation of this unprecedented strategic offensive operation, wrote in his memoirs "Soldier's Duty":

It is our happiness that we have experienced, knowledgeable workers in the front rear department... I remember the generals with a feeling of admiration and gratitude... N.K. Zhilin, the quartermaster of the Front, A.G. They and hundreds, thousands of their subordinates worked tirelessly. I quote this quote also in connection

with the fact that when, 5 years after the war, I entered the Military Transport Academy in Leningrad, which then bore the name of L. M. Kaganovich, the head of this academy was Lieutenant General Chernyakov Alexander Georgievich, he the one who was the head of military communications at Rokossovsky. And there I learned that in order to solve the problems of urgent and uninterrupted replenishment of the front troops with everything necessary for this operation, Alexander Georgievich, who was in charge of all the railways in the front line, took decisive measures to restore them. And since by that time it was possible to prepare only one track, then in order to increase its capacity in one direction - to the front and avoid the oncoming

the return of the empty cars to the rear, General Chernyakov makes a decision: to drive the freed rolling stock at the unloading stations into urgently constructed temporary rail dead ends and even dump the already empty cars from the rails in order to clear the way for arriving trains with goods going to the front! I must say that

our First Belorussian Front then had a length from north to south of about 900 kilometers. And against him, as it became known later, were 63 German divisions and other troops with a total number of 1 million 200 thousand people, 9500 guns, 900 tanks, 1350 aircraft. And, of course, we were pleased that at our front in the Bobruisk region at the end of June, 5 German infantry and one tank divisions were surrounded and more than 20 thousand fascist warriors were captured. And soon about the same number of Wehrmacht soldiers were taken prisoner during the liberation of Minsk. At the same time, the troops of our front also liberated the Ukrainian city of Kovel, to the north of which our battalion was still on the defensive. Marshal Rokossovsky writes about these events

The enemy, who unleashed the war, fully felt the force of our blows. He now had to experience defeat after defeat, and without any hope for a more or less favorable outcome of the war ... The fascist German command was not helped even by replacing one general with another.

From intelligence data, we learned that the unfortunate Field Marshal Bush, who commanded Army Group Center, was replaced by Model. There was a saying among the staff officers: "Model? Well, let's Model!" Apparently, one of the comrades altered Chapaev's catchphrase from the famous movie: "Psychic, you say? Come on, psychic!"

By all indications, it was clear that our defensive stage of hostilities should soon also turn into an offensive one. And judging by the intensive influx of more and more new tasks to identify enemy firing points, to capture "tongues", the approach of the offensive was felt on our sector of the front as well. Already after the war, I learned what role our Front Commander, then General of the Army Rokossovsky, played in defending his idea of Operation Bagration before the Headquarters and Stalin. And she went down in history as the battle for Belarus.

This operation, which began on June 24, 1944, was another crushing blow to the fascist military machine. After all, 100 thousand selected troops of the Wehrmacht were surrounded here, and in general the Germans lost more than 350 thousand of their cutthroats here. This battle, in terms of its military-strategic significance, after its completion was equated with the victory at Stalingrad. If the army of Paulus was captured there, then here the whole group of armies "Center" was defeated and ceased to exist. And this was convincing evidence of the strength, steadfastness, courage and determination not only of the Red Army, but of the entire Soviet people.

...Our activity to identify data about the enemy was the most diverse. For example, in our company, as I already said, 20-year-old senior lieutenant Ivan Yanin, by the way, was awarded government awards three times, but did not have a single wound. He was a man of boundless, simply insane courage. And in order to call on the enemy's fire and thereby reveal the location of his firepower, our Vanyusha clung to the awards polished to a shine and the gold shoulder straps he had in stock (where and how did he manage to get them? We all had only field, khaki), climbed the parapet of the trench and on a bright, sunny day, slowly walked along it in full view of the Germans, actually causing fire on himself.

Fritz, thinking that this was some kind of high rank (epaulettes in the sun shone like generals), opened fire, often even mortar or artillery, and our observers pinpointed the places from which the fire was fired, determined the types of weapons and thus collected material for compiling a detailed diagram of the firing points of the enemy defense. And, oddly enough, not a single bullet touched this brave man. He was like a charmer! He died much later, without receiving a single wound. But more about that in due time.

Sometimes it was possible to call the fire of the Germans and deliberately teasing their machine gunners. Our virtuosos got the hang of "knocking out" shots with machine guns, dividing the machine-gun burst into a series of "ta...ta..ta-ta-ta". And on the 5-6th series, some angry Fritz could not stand it and launched a long line in our direction. As they say, as required to prove!

More often than usual, these days, our trenches began to be visited by battalion commander Osipov and chief of staff Lozova with their assistants, as well as political workers. By the way, during my front-line life and long military service, I met many brave, intelligent, responsible and conscientious workers of the party political apparatus.

During the period I am describing, most of all, almost without getting out of the trenches, Major Olenin visited us, who replaced Zheltov, who died near Rogachev. And, I must say, it was a worthy replacement. He was just as brave, did not break away from us, agitated by his personal example. In general, political work well organized and skillfully carried out

among the troops has always been of great importance and uplifting. So we, officers of the command level, conducted our political work by all educational means: both by conversations and by personal example, like communists.

At this time, several attempts by the division's reconnaissance company to capture the German "tongue" were unsuccessful. Then the task of getting the prisoner was assigned to our battalion. At the beginning, there was an idea of the commander of the 38th division, General G. M. Solovyov, to conduct reconnaissance in force with the help of a penal battalion or at least one of his companies. However, the battalion commander found another solution. The enemy's fire weapons had basically already been identified earlier, and it was decided to get the "tongues" in a different way, since reconnaissance in force could lead to unnecessary losses, especially undesirable before an offensive. (Our "father" felt sorry for the penalty boxers!) And here is what I read later in the book of

General Gorbатов: I hated this method of reconnaissance with every fiber of my soul - and not only because the battalions suffer heavy losses, but also because such sorties alert the enemy, induce him to take measures in advance against our possible offensive.

The general also mentions the instructions of Marshal Rokossovsky, who warned that in order to maintain surprise and save ammunition, reconnaissance in force should not be undertaken on the eve of the offensive. Apparently, our battalion commander (by that time already a colonel) Osipov well mastered the "science of winning", which both Rokossovsky and Gorbатов so confidently mastered.

According to the plan of the battalion commander, our 1st company and units of the PTR company, which was then commanded by Captain Vasily Tsigichko, in the area where

my platoon was defending, they had to create a noise "appearance" (if it is possible to define the plan so) of building a bridge or crossing a river. Vasya Tsigichko, a well-built, short-haired man of below average height, who was distinguished by surprisingly plump lips and possessed a quiet but juicy bass, showed special initiative and activity in this. The swampy terrain and these dead places, which our troops had to fight through rapidly, almost non-stop, implied the need to build at least decks or lay gati from poles and logs, even for light guns and light vehicles. Covering our actions was entrusted to the neighboring 2nd company of Captain Pavel Tavlyuy. For this purpose, several logs were dragged ashore (fortunately, part of the forest

blockage was already harmless, there were no mines) and they began to knock on them with small sapper shovels, simulating either hewing logs, or knocking them together. And on the opposite bank in the coastal bushes, directly opposite this place, they organized a powerful ambush, well camouflaged.

There was no "catch" the first night. But on the second, which was bright, our observers noticed a group of Germans crawling along the swampy shore to the place of "construction". Quietly, without noise, our ambush covered them. They stabbed the Nazis, who resisted and tried to signal their own, with bayonet-knives from SVT (Tokarev self-loading rifles). And three of them, bound and gagged, were brought to this shore, and then, after a cursory interrogation, which was conducted by my clerk-translator Vinogradov, they were sent further - to the headquarters of the

battalion. Three languages at once, and one of them is an officer! And he went to 8 penalty boxers who participated in the ambush, material for full early rehabilitation (and also without "redemption by blood") and for awarding, if not orders,

but only medals. After the successful capture of enemy "tongues", feeling some extraordinary elation before our transition

on the offensive, I wrote an application for membership in the party. At

that time, soldiers who distinguished themselves in battles were accepted into the party first of all. Being a communist was considered not so much an honor as a responsibility. And not only for yourself, but also for the work entrusted to you, the people entrusted to you and for the performance of combat missions.

One privilege was for those who truly valued it
rank to be the first to attack, the first to go under the bullets of the enemy.

And they wrote laconic statements: "I want to be in the forefront of the
defenders of the

Motherland ..." It was only later, much later, that I began to distinguish
real, true communists from those who joined the CPSU (b), and then the
CPSU, in order to make career or climb through, albeit into small (battalion,
regimental, and in civilian life - into district), but leading party bodies and
more or less high positions. They became especially impudent, these
pseudo-communists, during the Brezhnev-Gorbachev era, but even there,
at the front, some of them stood out for their insincerity and hypocrisy.

Examples of this were already visible to many of us even then, we
solved them without much difficulty, and they, these people, were frankly
alien among military officers, they openly teased them, they were shunned,
but from them - like water off a duck's back. Although I had been a candidate
member of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks since the autumn
of 1943, but only now, when I was awarded the next military rank, and there
was a military order on my chest, I decided that I was not ashamed to join
the Bolshevik Party. And even many years after those fiery days and nights,
even now, at the beginning of the 21st century, I am proud that it was then,
before decisive battles, one day before going on the offensive in the political
department of the 38th Guards Lozovsky Rifle Division that I handed out a
brand new membership card. It was equivalent to the highest government
award for me.

The party then for all of us was the party of Lenin-Stalin, and we firmly
believed that Stalin is Lenin today. This faith lifted us up, multiplied our
strength and, ultimately, accelerated the approach of Victory. Three million
communists gave their lives in the battles for their Motherland during the
Great Patriotic War. Over the same years, about 3.5 million were accepted
as party members, and more than 5 million as candidates, and two-thirds
of them joined the party at the front. And I think that those who now say
that when they went on the attack, they did not shout "For the Motherland,
for Stalin!" Or they did not have to raise platoons or companies to attack by
personal example. These words were not often heard, the circumstances
were not always suitable for them, but I, for example, did not

once said them, although he was not a political worker by position. Probably every communist military officer considered himself a bit of a commissar in the best sense of the word. It was. And it's not worth adjusting your feelings at that time in time, as many of our politicians and historians did and do, taking it to their credit, like one of the main communist ideologists in the past, academician Alexander Yakovlev and no less important (also in the past) political worker of the Soviet Army of General Dmitry Volkogonov.

So my, let's consider, the initial period of front-line life ended. Now she will somehow go under other sensations, under other own assessments. After all, now I am a communist, and I have a much greater responsibility for successes, and even more - for failures or blunders. And I was proud of this increased responsibility... CHAPTER 4 Operation "Bagration".

Offensive.

German surprises. "Spring Mina". Forcing the Bug. Furious enemy counterattacks. Insidious bullet. A familiar medical battalion It so happened that

along with my

transition from candidates to members of the CPSU (b), our battalion, along with the left-flank units of the 1st Belorussian Front, moved from a long and, frankly, relatively passive defense to an offensive. And, as it turned out, the offensive was also long, successful, but in terms of the load on the human body, it was rather exhausting.

Forced marches were involuntarily recalled while serving in the Far East. Still, the physical hardening obtained there was very useful at the front. Although the physical and nervous loads were incomparable. I called the defense relatively passive, unless, of course, we count sorties for "tongues" in the sector of our company and in other companies, and other reconnaissance operations and work with mines. Finally, it was the turn of our flank of the front to join the Operation Bagration, which had already gained momentum, to liberate Belarus. Over the past two weeks,

we have been well replenished with ammunition. For each PPSH assault rifle, we received 200-250 rounds of ammunition. Many machines had two stores, each with a capacity of 71

cartridge. Soldiers armed with rifles were given two more pouches in addition to service pouches. The machine gunners were also supplied with a decent amount of ammunition. Apparently, it was not in vain that we were called on the defensive to save cartridges. They also gave us dry food rations. They were not much different from those that were issued to us in February before the raid for Rogachev. Only now it included small cans of American, unusually pungent-smelling cheese (everything American and English still called the "second front" among us), and salty, slightly yellowed, but not losing its charm Ukrainian fat (probably, because we stood on the defensive on the land of Ukraine). All this was issued to us at the rate of 3-5 days of

active hostilities. True, it was provided at least once a day for hot meals from our camp kitchens, to the regularity and fullness of portions of which we were so used to during our time on the defensive. Of course, this was supposed only if the combat situation allowed.

The rear services took good care of even the repair and replacement of worn shoes. After all, we had long military campaigns ahead of us on the swampy and sandy land of Belarus. Only to the border with Poland it was necessary to go through more than 100 kilometers with battles.

Since almost the entire composition of the battalion units (except for the "encirclement", who were shod in boots with windings) was in boots (after all, officers, albeit former ones), the worn out was mainly replaced by equivalent footwear, except that many had to change their completely frayed "limps" on the "tarpaulin". A replacement fund also happened in the form of brand new English boots (also a "second front"!). These boots were ceremonially shiny, but somehow rough, inelastic, with unusually thick, stiff soles. As it turned out later, these soles were made of pressed and somehow glued cardboard, which literally swelled after 2-3 days of movement through the Belarusian swamps, and the boots themselves completely lost both their former gloss and strength. But the windings attached to the boots turned out to be worthy of praise - strong, durable. And they were suitable for many other things, even for women's stockings, as they were double ...

Craftsmen from among the penalty boxers somehow managed for some young, especially "smart" platoon officers (and many of us at least tried to follow the then youth fashion in some way) to sew fashionable boots - "Jimmy" with thin and narrow noses, but. .. from soldiers' canvas capes!

And to make them look like chrome ones, the owners thickly and often lubricated them with some incredible mixture of lard, soot, sugar and something else. Shine was achieved, but strength was not increased from this. And in the very first days of the offensive, they, like the English boots, quickly fell apart. After all, not on the asphalt, but on the swampy and sandy Belarusian land, one had to stomp in them. "Contributed"

to the preparations for the offensive and Voentorg, occasionally visiting us. And, as they said then, what only was not in this Voentorg: there was no cigarette, there was no cologne and blades for safety razors, there was not even tooth powder! The only things that were brought to us were small pieces of paper, cut specially for the size of cigarette rolls, and army tin buttons and buttonholes for khaki overcoats. It was rumored that they sold everything they needed before they got to the places closest to the trenches.

Preparations for the offensive were coming to an end... On the night of July 19, 1944, I was ordered to make several passages in certain places of the minefield we had built, since readiness for the offensive had already been declared. Although I myself mined this area, it was not easy to remove and defuse the mines. Another new moon was approaching, and the night, in July, and so not very long, was also dark. You can't use a flashlight, you had to do everything by touch. I did not want to involve anyone from the platoon in this case, so that the tragedy would not be repeated, as with Omelchenko. While I safely made these passages and marked them with poles with white rags, it was just right to squeeze out my tunic, completely soaked with sweat. That was the tension! But he made it before

dawn! And as soon as it began to get light, a powerful roar of cannonade broke out. It was a long-awaited artillery preparation. While she was walking, our units successfully overcame our own minefield and almost

came close to the river bank. The final volley of "Katyushas" was a conditional signal "Attack!"

It was already dawn, and, as on a movie screen, in the glow of explosions, the fighters rose together along the entire front line and their swift dash towards the German trenches. The pre-offensive excitement was strong. But it was very surprising that the Germans did not fire oncoming fire. Well, we think our artillery did a great job! Absolutely all firing points suppressed! With difficulty they overcame the swampy banks and the Vyzhevka River itself, which turned out to be quite shallow. And when with a loud "Hurrah!" in anticipation of hand-to-hand combat, they jumped into the German trenches, they were even more surprised: they were empty !!! But we knew that in front of us, together

with the Hungarian warriors, the elite division of the fascists "Dead Head" was also defending. Where did they all go? Still, they apparently somehow managed to sniff out

the time of our offensive. So our "Hurrah!", when we broke into the trenches, somehow immediately died out. It seems to be good that it happened, but the mood was for hand-to-hand combat!

And the offensive, as it was clear to us from the order, began along the entire left flank of our Front. This was a continuation of Operation Bagration, which began back in June.

The direction of the offensive of our battalion, or rather the 38th division, under whose operational subordination we were then, was towards the city of Malorita and further to Domachevo, which is south of Brest, in order to close the encirclement.

Soon, from the situation and from the messages of the command, it became clear to us that the enemy, having left covering detachments, that night began to withdraw in some places, mining roads, destroying bridges and crossings. But how far did they take their

covering troops? After we reached the second trench, a messenger from the regiment commander (I think it was the 110th Guards Rifle Regiment), on the flank of which we were operating, gave the company an order to sharply change the direction of the offensive with the task of capturing part of the town of Ratno, in which the enemy was still strong. resisted, capture and prevent the Germans from blowing up the bridge over the Pripyat River.

And before we had time to go 200-300 meters along a more or less dry place to the shore of the Pripyat, when suddenly several long and dense machine-gun bursts hit our columns. Our 1st company and the 2nd company of Captain Pavel Tavlii, following with us, lay down and immediately began to prepare both weapons and hand grenades for the upcoming battle. Soon, at the previously agreed signal, the companies burst into Ratno with a powerful jerk along the river bank, covering themselves with heavy fire from their own machine guns and machine guns. Grenades were thrown at the places where the Fritz fired, including several pillboxes and bunkers. And, literally not looking up from the fleeing Nazis, a relatively large group of our company, mainly Usmanov's platoon and mine, flew onto the bridge. We managed to quickly kill both his guards and those who tried to plant explosives in the bridge supports. Having captured the bridge, we concentrated on the western outskirts of the town. Of course, we had losses.

But, as it turned out, already on the other side, among the advancing penalty boxers there were several people who were injured even before the bridge was stormed, but did not leave the battlefield. But they already had all the rights to do this: they "redeemed the guilt with blood." But they could still fight - and fought! Such cases were not isolated, and they testified to the high consciousness of the penalty box fighters.

Of course, there were those who passed off the slightest scratch as "abundantly spilled blood." But it was already a matter of conscience and military solidarity.

As soon as we reached the western outskirts of Ratno, tanks were already rushing along the bridge after us. It was even somehow incomprehensible why they had not flown onto the bridge before us? After all, he was whole! But then the head was not busy with the analysis of the situation. It was necessary to assemble our units and, taking advantage of the fact that the enemy, with his surviving forces, again managed to break away from us, clarify the losses and clarify the further task. Troops and equipment were already moving along the highway to Brest, and we were still far from Malorita.

Our losses, unfortunately, were notable. In my platoon, 3 people died, there were also three wounded, but our Hecht was not among them all. And no one saw him either among the dead or among the wounded. The Bubble Squad Leader shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment. Hecht has so far been included in the list of "missing".

Much later, the reason for his disappearance became clear. For some, in difficult conditions, and even more so in dangerous ones, fortitude and courage arise, while for others, the desire to get away from psychological overloads and dangers progresses, shifting them to others. In extreme circumstances, this develops into banal cowardice. But about

this disappearance below.

While for about half an hour we were gathering our platoons, scattered and mixed during the attack on the outskirts of Ratno and storming the bridge, and sent the wounded to the rear, the order was received to rejoin the regiment that had crossed Pripyat to the south, and together with it to continue the offensive in the direction of the village of Zhirichi and beyond to Lake Turskoe. On the outskirts of Zhirich, the regiment again

met stubborn resistance. Our units were urgently transferred to the most dangerous direction, reinforcing the regiment's battle formations. Mixing with his soldiers, we noticed that there was some kind of revival in their ranks. After all, they understood that next to them in the role of ordinary soldiers were recent officers in various ranks and they would go on the attack together. And some kind of fresh, irresistible force seemed to flow into them. Still, this decision was wise - to merge together such different contingents of warriors. And then a machine gunner from my platoon, who was nearby (sorry, I can't remember his last name), noticed that several machine guns of the Fritz, who sat in the attic of a large hut, were firing especially intensively in our direction. The return rifle fire of the regimental soldiers did not give the desired effect. And since the place was open and only a few managed to dig here and there not even trenches, but only cells for prone firing, considerable losses from these machine guns

could be expected even before the attack. Well, during the attack, they still would have put many. And this penal says: "Now I'll smoke them out of there," picks up and loads the magazine with cartridges with incendiary and tracer bullets. I realized that he wanted to set fire to the roof of this ill-fated hut. It seems a pity, because a solid hut will burn down, but ... war is war. And

so clearly, in the light of the still not quite extinguished day, the fiery trails, sent by my glorious machine gunner, digging into this roof, were visible! Literally in a few minutes

the roof began to smoke and then burst into flames. The fire of the German machine guns ceased (it became hot there!), and then green rockets soared, signifying the start of the attack.

At first, the penitentiaries, and behind them the soldiers of the regiment, got up and, encouraging themselves with automatic bursts and rifle shots, rushed to the village.

The battle was again fleeting, and, perhaps, in some 15-20 minutes the village was completely ours. Already in the twilight that was beginning to thicken, the hut, lit by machine-gun bursts, was burning brightly. There were many German corpses, but there were also a lot of Fritz who escaped.

They retreated somehow at once, as if on command, and, taking advantage of the advancing darkness and dense forest, which closely adjoined Zhirichi from the west, disappeared from sight. The command came to stop for a short rest. Again counting losses, gathering units. Imagine my chagrin when I found out that among the dead was my machine gunner, who managed to "smoke out" the Germans, who sat down with machine guns on the roof, which was now burning down huts.

It was already completely dark when camp kitchens and ammunition carts suddenly found us. And how opportunely they arrived! After all, for the whole day there was actually no opportunity even to gnaw crackers. Yes, and it would be nice to replenish the ammunition. And here is not only a half-pot of some rich soup and a decent portion of buckwheat porridge with meat, but also a fighting hundred grams! For a long time I could not get out

of my memory the name of the deputy battalion commander for the rear, or rather the supply assistant. And this was Major Izmailov - tall, stout, somewhat slow in movements and speech, but rather quick in decisions. Even in the most difficult conditions, he knew how to do everything possible to feed the fighters and deliver ammunition. And the chief food officer, Captain Moses Zeltser, and Borya Tachaev, our "fire" supplier, I also always remember with a kind word. We barely had time to thoroughly refresh ourselves with a good dinner, which replaced our

entire daily ration, to sort out cartridges and grenades, when a messenger arrived from the regiment commander brought a new task: not to let the enemy break away far and not allow him to gain a foothold at some line over the coming night.

Our companies were again withdrawn from the regiment to its right flank, and in fact our battalion was now to act independently again. It was clear that the Germans would not just retreat, but would continue to leave covering detachments and try to slow down the pace of our offensive in order to have time to gain a foothold on advantageous lines. Of course, it was assumed that the main of these boundaries could be a large water barrier - the Bug River, or as it, in contrast to the Southern Bug, which flows through Vinnitsa, Nikolaev and flows into the Black Sea, was more often called the Western Bug.

It was a dark, albeit starry night on July 20 (the period of the new moon had just begun). There seemed to be an innumerable number of stars. And somehow, against their background, the infinity of the universe became clearer ... Almost groping, guided by the stars and a carefully illuminated compass, and by a rare and muffled voice communication, we slowly, fearing to run into an enemy ambush, moved forward until we ran into a lake Turskoe.

By that time, it somehow happened that, while moving cautiously in the dark, we lost direct contact not only with the regiment, which was now supposed to operate on our left, but also with the headquarters and the rest of the companies of the battalion.

After a slight hitch, our company commander decided to bypass the lake on his own and move to the village of Tur, where, most likely, one could meet another German barrier. To the right of us, the neighboring division operated, with which we had no connection at all. It turned out that our group of two companies had both flanks open. It was generally considered very dangerous. What if the Germans hit the flank? But, as they say, this time it passed!

And when by dawn (already July 20) our columns approached the village of Tur, the enemy met our marching guards with very intense machine-gun bursts. The main forces of our two companies, the mortar platoon of Misha Goldstein operating with us and the PTR platoon of Petya Smirnov, who replaced his namesake Zagumennikov (recently, before the offensive, was appointed commander of the PTR company), entered the battle. Where the third company and the rest of the battalion's forces were, we had not yet established.

And suddenly they heard that a fight began on the other outskirts of the village. This was exactly the combat unit of the battalion with headquarters, with which we

contact was lost. She circled the lake on the left and arrived just in time. And now, by the forces of everything, however, somewhat thinned, our penal battalion, the enemy was driven out of the village.

The result of such tense, almost continuous, exhausting attempts to catch up with the fleeing enemy, not to let him come to his senses and gain a good foothold, was a noticeable physical fatigue of the soldiers. And if the physical strength began to noticeably weaken, then the fighting spirit was preserved and it was he who invigorated us. It was also clear that if we slowed down the pursuit for some time, then later this could result in large losses for us when overcoming well-fortified enemy lines. After the Nazis were

driven out of the village of Tur, our units, having overcome a rather wide strip of dense forest, came to a completely dry, hard-soiled area, open on all sides for several kilometers. Since the Nazis again broke away from us and their barrier had nowhere to hide here, our platoons again curled up into columns. And here a surprise awaited us, prepared by the retreating Fritz.

Columns, of course, go along the roads easier and faster. On one of the roads leading from Tura south of the town of Malority to Khotislav (our new direction), the first platoon of our company was moving as a forward guard. All of a sudden there was an explosion in the group. This was blown up by one fighter on a mine laid by the retreating. The company

commander called me to the site of the explosion (in the company I was already considered a "specialist" in mines), and we found several more poorly camouflaged mines. Apparently, they installed them in a hurry. Probably, the forward guards from Dima Bulgakov's platoon, busy monitoring the possible appearance of the enemy, did not pay due attention to the road itself, which led to this tragic incident. This was urgently reported to the battalion headquarters, probes were made from rifle ramrods, and the movement resumed. Now the observation was carried out both forward and under the feet. True, there were no more mined areas, but the lesson was learned, and of course, the pace of movement decreased even more.

However, this was not the only surprise in this open area. Suddenly in the sky arose quite

a significant group of German fighters - "Messerschmitts" with crosses on the wings and fuselages. They fired at us at low altitudes, at low level. By dispersing quickly, we practically avoided serious losses. Of course, the fighters fired chaotically at the "Messers", but, unfortunately, to no avail.

Before this group of fascist vultures had time to hide, we heard the hoarse rumble of engines and a second wave of aircraft appeared noticeably higher in the sky, larger ones, probably bombers. Soon it became clearly visible how some objects of various configurations fell down from them, rapidly increasing in size as they approached the ground. I was bombed for the first time, but experienced officers and penalists immediately determined that these were bombs, but along with them some long objects were approaching the ground, making circles in the air and making chilling sounds. It turned out that to intimidate the Germans dumped scraps of rails, channels, and any other iron, even perforated metal barrels. All this, approaching the ground, gave rise to some unimaginable howls and whistles, from which it became, perhaps, even more terrible than from the bombing itself. The bombs were both fragmentation and high-explosive, raising high columns of explosions. Among them, "frog bombs" also fell - cluster

bombs containing many small either bombs or grenades, which scatter over a large area during an explosion and explode when

this.

These raids delayed us, but, nevertheless, we were approaching the village of Khotislav, on the Maloryta River. The city of Malorita now remained to our right, and by that time, the tankers of the neighboring division, advancing to the right of us, had probably managed to capture it. On

the way to Khotislav, two rivers had to be overcome: the Rytva and the Maloryta. These rivers were shallow (for more than a month there was intense heat and no rain!), and the Nazis, apparently, did not have time to fortify themselves on them. Therefore, they again limited themselves to barriers, which, opening fire and forcing us to turn around in a chain, soon left their positions. At this turn, the "Messers" tried to attack us again, but they were driven away by our red-star "hawks", met with friendly shouts of "Hurrah!"

This is the first time I have seen an air battle so close. True, it turned out to be short, since the vaunted German aces immediately retreated, as soon as one of the vultures caught fire, fell and exploded. The forcing of these

rivers passed without any special difficulties, fording, and by the evening we passed the village of Khotislav at once, without meeting the Germans in it. It must be said that many villages, settlements, villages were somehow incredibly similar to each other: they all had the same fate - they were either bombed or burned by fascist "torchlighters" who burned huts along with people. So was Khotislav...

Building on success, the battalion continued to move, in which our company was assigned a direction to the highway north of the village of Oltush. When our company approached the highway leading to Malorita and Kobrin during the night, the Germans offered us strong resistance. In any case, early in the morning before the attack, our mortarmen also had a chance to show the class of shooting here. Their mines lay exactly on the enemy positions behind the road embankment. It was like artillery preparation before an attack, although not as intense as we were used to. The team that raised

the companies to the attack, and a powerful throw to the highway, actually did not allow the majority of the defenders to escape, and they were finished off in hand-to-hand combat. I will not describe the details of this fight, I will only say that it was sharp, cruel, the Nazis seemed to be stunned by the fury with which our fighters rushed into it. And I will quote the words of the wonderful front-line poetess Yulia Drunina, who sadly passed away early: Whoever says that it's

not scary in war knows nothing about war. I only once saw hand-to-

hand combat Once in reality ...

And hundreds of times in a

dream! And we had to engage in hand-to-hand combat during the war more than once. And we dreamed of them for many,

many more years... So, this time the German barrier was, it seems, defeated. But immediately after the battle died down, we heard the noise of engines. I thought that now, because of the forest, which was not far from the highway, tanks would jump out and we would have a hard time. However, this noise gradually faded away, moving away, and soon completely died down.

these screeners manage to evade pursuit so quickly. They broke away from us in cars! That would be tanks for us! But the tanks, of course, avoided swampy places and pressed the enemy in other sectors and directions.

And the pace of our offensive began to noticeably decrease with every hour, with every kilometer. After all, the third sleepless night was behind us (assuming that on the night before the offensive there was also no time for sleep), which completely exhausted both the penalty boxers and us, their commanders.

Our battalion commander, who understands everything and feels "dad", although he himself moved most of the time on his "jeep", accurately estimated that very little separates us all from that last line when people generally lose the ability to perform any task, because sleep can just overdo and dump them! He ordered to stop the movement and, while there is no danger of a collision with the enemy, to give a short rest, at least for three hours.

By that time (and it was already close to noon), our companies had crossed a rather wide strip of forest and reached a dry, elevated field, from which the countryside and our further direction of attack on the village of Radezh could be seen far away. This is where the resting place was chosen. It was chosen well also because the German barrier had nowhere to hide here.

Everyone was exhausted by the almost non-stop movement, often under enemy fire and through the wetlands, which abounded in the Ukrainian-Belarusian Polissya.

The faces of the fighters were haggard from physical overwork and nervous tension, their eyes were reddened from sleepless nights. One thought dominated everyone: to fall, to fall asleep at least for an hour, for a minute ... After all, during these three days that have passed since the beginning of the offensive, there was virtually not a minute when it would be possible, even for the shortest time, to close our eyes, take a nap and at least a little bit to restore their strength. Moreover, only

memories.

It is clear that our privates, and soon we officers, as soon as we realized the meaning of the "rest" command, immediately fell on

earth, and literally in a moment everyone was overtaken by a long-awaited, but

disturbing dream. How difficult it turned out to be to establish at least some order of rest in order to organize the guarding of the sleeping by the forces of those who need rest and sleep no less. My deputy Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Ivanovich Petrov, understood how difficult it was for me to walk, keep up with everyone, when the pain in the wounded leg made itself felt more and more, and suggested that I be the first to rest while he was awake and organized security. And I immediately, like many of our fighters, almost instantly fell into a deep sleep ...

After the hour and a half that I got to rest, Petrov barely managed to wake me up. Finally waking up, I realized that it was necessary to urgently change the guard in order to give him a rest, sleep!

Our rear by this time arrived in time with kitchens and ammunition. Despite empty stomachs, many rushed to replenish their ammunition first, and only then visited the kitchen. This time, the order of the

battalion commander was given to the entire command staff to explain to the soldiers why the people's commissar's "weaving" of vodka was not issued before dinner. The fact is that even these 100 grams of alcohol could aggravate the physical condition if taken on a very empty stomach and with such a degree of fatigue. Therefore, we were all given vodka just before the command "forward" was given again. ... Our further offensive went through

the village of Radezh, which turned out to be small, but very attractive, miraculously preserved from destruction and fires, almost a whole village, each house of which was densely planted with fruit trees and flowering shrubs. Rare residents, crawling out of cellars and cellars, managed to treat us on the go with already ripe fragrant fruits. Something, apparently, prevented the Fritz from burning this beauty. However, we were in a hurry again in order to prevent the Nazis from gaining a foothold

on the Bug (Western Bug) River, this large water frontier. In width, depth and speed of the current, it seemed to be much more serious than those already left behind by Pripyat, Rytva, Maloryta and others.

numerous streams with swampy floodplains, as well as canals and tubules, made, apparently, to turn this swampy land suitable for agriculture. By evening, we were again fired upon

by the enemy, who had settled between the highway and the railway. We managed to cut these roads south of Domachevo. And soon, finally, we came quite close to the very Bug River, on which the then-not-yet-legendary Brest Fortress stood (the title of "Fortress-Hero" was awarded to it only on the 20th anniversary of the Victory, in 1965). And the Bug, contrary to our expectations, turned out to be relatively narrow, with a lazy course. We had to cross this river. Above the surface of the water there was

some especially deep, as it seemed, ominous silence. No enemy was found on this shore. And, since the crossing was supposed to begin at dawn, we had some reserve time to give additional rest to the soldiers, although a certain part of the night was spent in preparation for the fording and for the upcoming battle.

In our company, armed mainly with PPSH assault rifles (in the soldier's jargon - "daddies"), reloading weapons, especially at night, was fraught with some inconvenience. The point is this. To recharge the disk magazine of the machine, you need to disassemble it, that is, remove the cover, start the spring of the ejector device, manage not to spill the cartridges remaining in the magazine snail, fill it up to the touch by touch.

And his limit is 71 rounds. Not everyone has been able to do it.

straightaway. During the night, it was necessary to reconnoiter and mark the fords unnoticed by the enemy, not only reload the weapon, but, together with the equipment, prepare it to overcome a relatively large water barrier, especially since there were no watercraft nearby. There was nothing to build rafts or anything like that either. We were

surprised and delighted when, apparently from a neighboring regiment of the division, an officer arrived with two soldiers and said that he was ordered to blow up several large trees standing right on the bank with TNT bombs in order to make it easier for us to ford the river. Moreover, the officer said, they will try to undermine

make sure that the butts of trees remain on the shore, and the crowns fall into the water. And the undermining itself for the purpose of camouflage will be done during artillery

preparation. We doubted such accuracy of undermining. Artillery spoke at dawn. It was joined by our mortarmen, whom we have long ceased to call "past-markers." On the opposite bank, among the already

noticeably yellowed fields, a dirt road wound like a snake, leading into a forest that turned blue on the near pre-dawn horizon. It seems to be a familiar, native, Russian landscape. However, there, beyond the Bug, there is already a "foreign land". And we remembered it.

The sappers also blew up the trees, but as planned, they succeeded only in the area of my platoon. The tree, indeed, lay down in strict accordance with the promise - across the coastal part of the riverbed, rooted on the shore. Its crown fell into the water, but for some reason, to our joy, it was not carried away by the current. I thought that fate favored me again. After all, my "success" in swimming after the February flood in the Belarusian river Drut did not improve at all. The Germans fired back somehow

sluggishly and mostly from small arms. And when the forcing began, a tree blown up in our area greatly facilitated our task. For non-swimmers, it was almost a bridge. In addition, the windings available in the platoon were tied into one long rope, which was held by both those who could swim and the "axes". And for the umpteenth time, even despite the still significant water barrier, the Nazis left their defensive positions almost without serious

resistance. They retreated again, frightened, probably, by the pressure and the speed with which our foot troops advanced, who managed to catch up with the motorized

their barriers.

Having concentrated on the western coast and occupied the coastal strip, our units began to bring themselves into the condition necessary for operations on land. The command was again given to roll up into company columns and parallel routes, using roads and clearings, to continue pursuing the enemy (special attention

was ordered to pay reconnaissance, including for the detection of mines on the way). But now we were already

in Poland. The western border of the USSR was behind! Exactly three years have passed since the long thirty days of the defense of the Brest Fortress. And so we got an honorable and at the same time difficult mission to return to the Soviet Union its western border, and long-suffering Belarus - its glorious city of Brest (the heroism of the defenders of which was appreciated only 20 years after the war). Back in the

trenches, waiting for the time when we find ourselves "abroad", on the territory of another country (after all, the vast majority of us had never even thought of visiting the borders of the Motherland), we talked a lot about this. Among the penalized were participants in the liberation of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine in 1939. Living witnesses and participants of those campaigns, they told about a variety of incidents, including the unfriendly actions of a part of the hostile residents. They talked, for example, about the fact that bouquets of flowers were thrown into the columns of the Red Army from the crowds of the population that met them, in which ... grenades were sometimes hidden! I didn't really believe in it, but it was alarming ... And now our company column was built in such a

way that, if necessary, we could quickly turn into a chain. A reinforced marching guard was sent ahead, which included several people armed with homemade probes for detecting mines. After walking only about a kilometer, on the road we met an elderly Pole who spoke Russian tolerably. His

benevolence was clearly expressed both in the smiles with which he accompanied his words, and in the joyful intonations during the conversation. We learned from him that the Germans left in cars as soon as the cannonade thundered on the river. So it's been about two hours. There were no signs of ambushes or barriers. Having passed 3-4 kilometers from the coast to the west, we must turn strictly north from the

wetlands, go east of the Polish city of Byala Podlaska to the Brest-Warsaw highway and saddle this road. And she remained the main and only corridor

possible withdrawal of the German group of four divisions surrounded in Brest. To our battalion and regiments

The 38th division was just tasked with completing the encirclement this group of Germans and cut off their retreat to the west.

Determined to reach this highway as soon as possible, we moved non-stop along some country road through an increasingly dense forest. And suddenly in the middle of the column of the second platoon there was a strong explosion! It looked like a large artillery shell had exploded. The thought immediately came to us that this time a powerful barrier had been set up for us. Right

before my eyes, people from the platoon of my friend Fedya Usmanov fell like sheaves, feet to the epicenter of the explosion. Several people fell in my platoon as well. I felt such a strong blow to my chest that I could barely stand on my feet. Almost simultaneously

with this explosion, less powerful pops began to be heard on both sides of the road, where the soldiers who remained on their feet rushed. As if the Germans were hitting a well-targeted place with small-caliber mortars. Now people were falling there too, on the side of the road, struck down by these mines. Those who rushed to help them also fell. Something incredible was happening. As it turned out, then the stereotype

of thinking simply worked. And it was not at all an artillery and mortar shelling - the platoon was blown up by the so-called "spring mine", that is, a "jumping mine", familiar to me from my studies at the school. Then I knew her under the name "SMI-35". This mine burrows into the ground, and two completely

imperceptible wire "antennae" remain sticking out above its surface, touching which leads to an explosion. But first, an expelling charge is triggered, the main mine "jumps" out of a metal glass and explodes at a height of one to one and a half meters. This part of the mine is stuffed with more than one hundred metal balls and strikes like shrapnel. It was this mine that mowed down almost the entire second platoon and partially others.

And near the road on both sides, the Nazis installed more than two dozen conventional anti-personnel mines. Precisely, the bastards calculated that the survivors would immediately rush off the road into the forest adjacent to it, and there ... We already took these explosions for mortar shelling.

Of everything that happened here, it was strange that at first marching guards with probes passed along the road, then a company commander with a control cell (5-6 people), followed by the entire first platoon. And none of these people touched the insidious "antennae". But the second platoon was not so lucky. And if he had not touched this mine, then my platoon certainly would not have been able to avoid this fate.

I don't know what supernatural power saved me from the mine this time. I didn't wear any talismans, I didn't know any prayers or conspiracies, I was deeply unbelieving from childhood and even was a member of the "Union of militant atheists" (what kind of "unions" and "societies" we didn't belong to then!).

And that's how things turned out. Literally a few minutes before the explosion, I felt awkward from the fact that the machine gun hanging on my chest with its magazine somehow inconveniently stuffed the same place in the lower part of the chest on the go. Noticing that I was adjusting the machine every now and then, my orderly Zhenya advised me to tighten the belt and raise the machine higher, which I did. And almost immediately there was an explosion. And then one of the balls of this mine hit right in the metal part of my machine gun, making a solid recess in it. Such was the force of his blow. So that's why I almost got knocked down! And all the lethal force of this piece of metal was distributed over the steel mass of my PPSH. It is clear that if the automaton had remained in its original place, then not a recess in its steel body, but a solid hole in mine would have been provided. And so I got off with a big bruise across the entire chest. Well, in war as in war.

Some are lucky and some are not. Fedya Usmanov was pierced through the chest here. The injury is severe. How to consider whether he was lucky or not? Could kill, like others. He was treated for a long time, but after the hospitals he returned to the battalion. Many in such cases did not return, who did not want to share their fate with the penalty box. And you can understand them, we did not have any condemnations of those who decided

on this. Luck in war is an important thing. After all, this is happiness, planned by nothing and no one, and not provided by knowledge, skill, or experience. Rather, it is what we call fate. Here you are lucky or not lucky - and that's it. And nothing else.

And with mines, my subordinates and I had to face very close in an even more dramatic situation. But more about that in due time. We have lost many here.

Most of them were killed and died soon after from their wounds. The insidiousness of these "spring-mines" is also that, bursting at such a height, they most of all affect the abdomen. And these are usually mortal wounds. Of course, if a radical surgical operation is not performed within a short time, which in combat conditions is practically

impossible.

I have seen a lot in the war. And many, of course, for the first time. Now, for the first time, I saw so many killed and wounded at once from one explosion, not even a multi-ton bomb, but only one mine. This is scary. You can't get used to this even in war. We then left with the wounded a small

group of fighters, mostly lightly wounded. The company commander reported on the radio to the battalion headquarters about the losses and about the place where medical aid and means for transporting the wounded should be sent. Hastily buried the dead and just as hastily identified who was buried in a mass grave. We needed to move on. Here I will deviate

a little from the chronology of those events and note how important it is to determine the map, orienting it correctly on the ground, so that the burial place is correctly indicated in the notice to relatives.

And that's why I stop here. About 25 years after the Victory, military service brought me to the left-bank Ukraine, to Kharkov. And I decided to find the grave of my older brother, who died in 1943 on the territory of the Zaporozhye region. In the "funeral", received then by our mother,

it was said that he was buried "on the northern outskirts of the Shevchenko farm, Shevchenkivsky district, Zaporozhye region."

It seemed easier: take a card and go! But it was not there. There is no such region in this area. According to information from the Regional Military Commissariat, there has never been such a district in the Zaporozhye region. And there are either 9 or 11 Shevchenko farms in the region, but how many there were before the war still needs to be clarified.

How much work and time did it take for me and the regional military registration and enlistment office to find out in which of the farms with this name she fought on the day of her brother's death, using the archives of the USSR Ministry of Defense, according to the dates of passage with battles of the military unit that sent the "funeral", and then to establish in which mass grave and from where, after the war, the remains of the dead soldiers were demolished. Only after many months of intense correspondence did I finally succeed in laying flowers and crouching on the ground, which sheltered forever my older brother,

who served me as an ideal person. But even now, almost 60 years after the war, many descendants of the dead cannot find the graves of the

heroes in order to bow to their ashes. Well, then the company, now almost in a two-platoon composition, moved on to carry out the task.

Already at sunset we were fired upon by the enemy. The fire was fired from the side of the birch grove, which we got the name "Kvadratnaya" because of its

We were on the western outskirts of a village. The distance to the grove was decent, and many hoped that the bullets would not reach us, and did not really worry about cover or camouflage.

However, suddenly a German heavy machine gun began to speak in the grove, and a tall penalty box standing near the wall of a wooden shed next to me suddenly slowly began to sink down, struck down by this burst, which almost also hit me and those who were standing nearby. The bullet went right through his chest. I note that there were no female medical staff in the penal battalion, and medical instructors were appointed in each department from among the penalized, who were given several additional dressing bags. We bandaged the wounded and dragged him behind the barn, and then further to the collection point for the wounded. Grove "Kvadratnaya", it

turns out, was the last frontier from which the enemy stopped leaving their positions. They, these lines, were no longer temporary barriers, and we were forced to take each of them with a fight. We also had to repel counterattacks, sometimes 3-4 per day, but the offensive impulse, despite significant losses, did not fade away. Now our offensive has become more difficult and much

slower. Suffice it to say that sometimes in a day they advanced with

heavy grueling battles for only 10-12 kilometers, or even less.

At night, both our battalion commander and the commander of the 110th regiment, which was again operating nearby, stopped the movement, gave the fighters an opportunity to rest and eat a little, and sometimes cheer up with "people's commissar's" vodka doses (100 grams). By the way, vodka for a warrior in battle, with such physical and emotional overstrain, is a cure for severe stress. They didn't get drunk from such doses, but they still raised the spirit, at least a little, but they added strength.

... Only by the middle of the day on July 25, we knocked out the Germans from their last defensive line between the railway and the Brest-Warsaw highway. Here we were ordered to consolidate and stand to the death, to deprive the enemy of the opportunity to break out of the pincers in which his Brest grouping was squeezed. Now the freeway, already saddled by us, seemed like a knife blade that crashed into our battle formations. The enemy tried with all his strength to climb this narrow blade and put incredible pressure on the fighters, causing pain, suffering and death. Already on that day, we felt the desperate desire of the Nazis to break out of the closed encirclement. They

launched attack after attack. The fighting here immediately became fierce, stubborn. Urgently to dig in - that was the main thing that was necessary, taking into account the peculiarities of the terrain, which consisted primarily in the fact that the

surroundings were relatively dense, although not old forest, and because of this density, visibility was poor. The situation was dire,

dangerous.

The German fired intense, almost continuous fire, including explosive bullets. And this was perceived as unusual. Hitting the trees, their dense branches and crowns, these bullets exploded, giving the impression that the shots sounded very close by. A terrible state when you don't know where they are shooting from: in front, behind, from the sides or from above... comfortable position. And such control was needed, first of all, by the former

pilots, quartermasters and even tankers, that is, those who did not previously belong to the queen

of the fields - the infantry. The enemy was breaking through. And our army had to repel as many as five enemy attacks before evening! This is almost every half an hour continuous fire whirlwinds, countless crowds of screaming and non-stop shooting, sometimes stupidly drunk Fritz, who seemed to have no end! And they all rush to our positions. A terrible situation, when it seems that you can't even raise your head under an automatic machine-gun whirlwind, but you need to return fire in this hell, and even more effective, in order to lay down the enemy, not give him a chance to slip through, slip through. Here and there the dead appeared. And many, even relatively lightly wounded, remained to fight on. They could legally leave, but they didn't

leave ... When repelling the third or fourth fascist attack during my next run, I was thrown to the ground with a strong blow to my left leg, which had not yet had time to get stronger after a memorable wound on a mine blockage in defense. Well, I thought, this leg got it again! But when he

fell, he felt no pain. Examined the leg, saw a hole in the top of the boot. Strange, there is a hole, but the leg, it seems, is intact. He reached into his boot with his hand to check for blood, but stumbled upon an unusually curved stainless steel spoon, which he always wore behind his left bootleg. He took it out - and was surprised ... it was bizarrely curved, simply mutilated. It turns out that the German bullet was either running low, or had previously pierced the trunk of a thin tree, but, no longer having lethal force, it only pierced the boot and, hitting the spoon, turned all its remaining kinetic energy into a blow that knocked me down. Lucky again! Truly, this

spoon, like an automatic machine then, was probably my talismans. It is a pity that I did not manage to save this spoon until the end of the war. There was no time for souvenirs back then.

By evening, our rear troops brought up a lot of ammunition, and everyone received a good supply of them. Most of the fighters even stuffed gas mask bags with grenades and cartridges, throwing away gas masks.

The night that followed was very restless. Under the cover of darkness, armored vehicles tried to break through along the highway, with which

our infantrymen and the anti-tank forty-five guns of the regiment coped even in the dark. I cannot fail to

note that Misha Goldstein's mortar platoon was very lucky here. Retreating, the Germans threw a whole warehouse of their 81-millimeter mines. Their design and dimensions were well suited to our 82-mm mortars. All that was needed was a correction of the firing range due to a mismatch in caliber. With these trophy mines, Misha conducted, in essence, barrage fire along the highway all night, which helped our anti-tank forces to smash the Fritz, who were trying to slip along the highway in armored vehicles and cars. By dawn, a large group of horsemen appeared on the motorway from the direction of the Germans, as

well as steam-horse carts on rubber wheels and even horse-drawn guns. But met with heavy fire from artillery and our mortars, those of them who survived quickly turned back.

From the morning of July 26, Hitler's attacks followed one after another with unrelenting ferocity. The Germans threw 24 tanks and up to two infantry battalions into one of them. Aviation supported them. The ground heaved, explosions of bombs and shells merged into a continuous roar. This time two or three tanks managed to break through. But only. The rest of the armada ran into the steadfastness of our soldiers and guards of the division. They fought selflessly, and their morale remained high. In a battle, especially in a sharp, tense one, there is a state of some kind of intoxication with battle, when there is no longer any fear, not even fear for oneself, but only the joy of battle! Yes, oddly enough, but it is joy, unaccountable, but very tangible. In such a fighting ecstasy, the fighter often does not even notice the wounds. I know this both for myself and for many of my comrades.

I will give a few lines from the military memoirs of N.V. Kupriyanov "With faith in Victory" about the combat path of the 38th Guards Lozovsky Rifle Division. Of course, there is not a word here about our penal battalion, which operated together with the regiments of the division. Probably, at that time, the strictest taboo was imposed on information about penal battalions.

... The main blow fell on the 110th regiment. Enemy planes hovered continuously over the battle formations. It seemed that in this

in pitch hell, none of the fighters will be able to raise their heads. So, probably, the enemy tankers, who went on the attack, also thought.

But as soon as the enemy tanks and infantry approached, they were met by dense fire from the guards. The tanks were most effectively fired by the 45-mm guns of the regiment's battery ... and a platoon of anti-tank rifles. Guardsmen repelled six enemy counterattacks.

The enemy suffered heavy losses.

Yes, the enemy had a lot of losses there. But our losses were unprecedentedly large. As if we were given some kind of "compensation" for the comparatively weaker resistance of the Germans in the previous days and for the less tangible losses that we suffered in the previous stages of the offensive. I have already mentioned that during the war no correspondents

ever appeared in our penal battalion. And after the war, in none of the military memoirs I read, even in the book of the uncompromising and straightforward General A.V. Gorbатов, did not mention the actions of the penalized either on our Belorussian front or on others. When I came across the book cited here, I hoped to find in it a mention of our SB. After all, for so long, side by side in very difficult conditions, we acted with the 110th regiment of this division! But not a word anywhere! Perhaps this fact also became the reason that I took up the pen to highlight the undeservedly forgotten pages of the military history of the Great Patriotic War.

By the day of the 40th anniversary of the Victory, in 1985, I managed to find and organize a meeting of front-line friends in our penal battalion.

The meeting after forty years revealed to us one truth: oh, how many details of those assault, fiery nights and days fade in memory, how time changes past impressions, assessments of events. But the most difficult, the most dangerous, as a rule, is remembered to the smallest detail. Among my few front-line friends who lived to see the 40th

anniversary of the Victory, Major General Filipp Kiselev also came to the meeting, who then, near Brest, was a captain, the first assistant to the battalion chief of staff, or PNSh-1, as it was then

the position was named.

Due to the nature of his, already general, official duties, he more than once visited the site of those battles near Byala Podlaska. There was, he said, a large well-groomed mass grave of Soviet soldiers. Perhaps there were no graves anywhere else, on the stones of which there would be so many names of officers. And these were mostly the names of the fines who died there. Judging only by this grave, one could guess how much blood we got the Victory in general and the liberation of Brest in particular.

Here in our common memory there were no discrepancies. Everyone remembered the details of those fierce battles. They all fought there decisively and courageously. Nobody left their positions. Indeed, until the day when the encircled group of Germans was captured, for another two days the Nazis were desperately trying to break through to the west. But both the guardsmen and the penalty box fought to the death. As near Moscow, as in Stalingrad. To what limit of tension did we and our fighters reach in those days, if in the end the very

feeling of fear of being killed disappeared from us! And on that day, July 26, in the next of the fascist attacks, undertaken in the morning, the Germans, trying to break through our sector, walked in a dense mass. Now, already without the former arrogance, they did not walk to their full height, but crawled, clinging to the ground, either under the threat of being shot by their own officers (and their menacing voices reached us), or in despair. They managed to get close to our positions within a grenade throw, but despite their heavy fire,

we threw grenades at the Nazis. And when I got up from the trench and threw another grenade into this crawling mass, a machine gunner was killed next to me. I rushed to the silent "Degtyarev" and at that moment I felt a strong blow, as if by a powerful electric current, in my right thigh and I completely lost the sensation of my right leg (it was "a blind bullet wound in the upper third of the

right thigh with nerve damage"). The attack was repulsed, the Fritz, the survivors, crawled back. In the resulting lull, my faithful orderly Zhenya dragged me into some recess like a funnel and ran to look for a nurse.

Neither my individual dressing bag (IPP), nor the dressing material that the nurse had, was clearly not enough for a tight, pressure bandage. From what Zhenya offered me

dressing package I refused. After all, no one is insured that he himself will not need it! I had to use my sweaty, salty undershirt.

Having finished dressing, they dragged me to the regimental collection point for the wounded, which was about two hundred meters from the line of fire. I sent Zhenya to my deputy Sergei Petrov to tell him: now he is in command of a platoon. Probably, an hour later, a wagon arrived, onto which they loaded us, about 15 people. The horse was a trophy, a kind of hefty bityug heavy truck. He would, of course, take away more than one such cart. A soldier of my platoon was sitting next to me with a terrible wound to his face. An explosive bullet hit him on the side of the bridge of his nose and turned his left eye into a gaping bleeding hole. How much courage and patience was in his clenched fists to a chalky pallor. And he was silent somehow unnaturally, detachedly, overcoming, apparently, incredible pain and being afraid to open his tightly clenched teeth, so as not to let out a groan or cry.

We were taken to the PMP (regimental first-aid post), and there they filled out for each primary document on the wound, the so-called "Forward Area Card", which confirmed that the wound had been received in battle. From there, already in a truck full of bedridden and sitting wounded, we were taken to the nearest medical battalion.

They placed everyone in a very long barn, almost "to the eyeballs", filled with a thick layer of fresh, fragrant straw and hay spread on the earthen floor, strictly warning that no one would think of smoking. Let's all burn! Feeling my pockets, I realized that I lost my pipe somewhere in this battle. It's a pity, she served me for a long time and faithfully. What a native, almost forgotten peaceful smell came from this common bed of ours, so different from the smell of gunpowder burning, sweat and blood that soaked all of us ...

Without waiting for the arrival of doctors or any of the medical staff to show my document on the injury, which indicated the need for urgent medical attention, I, without feeling pain, fell asleep sweetly.

He didn't seem to sleep long. The nurse woke me up. Seeing her, I realized that I was back in the same medical battalion where I was put on

legs after my ill-fated explosion on a mine exactly a month ago, on June 26. This is such a coincidence both in time and place. My already familiar sister Tanya woke me up (I remember she was from Kalinin), with whom during my first stay in this medical battalion we entertained the wounded with the performance of Russian romances to the guitar. I remember that more than others, our listeners liked the one in which they sang about some seagulls over some lake. Everything was forgotten, even the song! Only battles, terrible, bloody, were not forgotten! ... It was joyful to realize that I

had fallen into the hands of already familiar doctors, and immediately a hope was born that they would cope with my current injury just as successfully and I would soon be able to return to the front.

I was carried on a stretcher to the preoperative room, which was located in one of the classrooms of a small school or something similar to it. Moans and screams came from the other room. As it turned out, there was an operating room. From it, blocking the groans of the wounded and the voice of the doctor, the choice Russian

obscenities rumbled. Soon everything was quiet and a man covered with his head was carried out on a stretcher. Tanya explained to me that he had a very serious wound, but for some reason anesthesia did not take him. And either from an overdose of it, or from the severity of the wound, he died on the operating table.

As I found out later, it was my penalty box, a pilot from the division commanded by Stalin's son Vasily. At one time, this Petukhov told a lot of interesting things about his division commander. And then I could not even imagine that fate would ever bring me together with the son of our generalissimo. I was dragged next

to the operating table. I remember how some sticky fear seized me. So I did not want the same thing to happen to me on this table as to my predecessor. Right here, not on the battlefield. It's one thing if they write in the funeral "he died a heroic death in battle", and another thing - "died of wounds" ...

Approximately the same feeling of fear I experienced in the defense near Zhlobin, when for the first time in some forest clearing, where there were no trenches, I came under a German artillery raid. Then it seemed to me that the whistle of each incoming projectile is the whistle of "my" projectile, which flies straight at me. And after a few minutes, which seemed to me almost an eternity, my only desire was: let it be "my" projectile that will fly in soon and everything will be

over. I confess that it was a strong fear, almost animal. But after all, the whole "cunning" in war is not the absence of fear, but the ability to overcome it, to suppress fear in oneself.

Yes, and I learned to distinguish the whistle or rustle past the flying shells, which did not have to bow at all. Well, here, in the medical battalion, a fear of some other kind manifested itself, and somehow it disappeared by itself. Now

another page of my front-line epic was coming, hospital. I will talk about it in another chapter.

CHAPTER

5 The second wound. Escape from the hospital. Alien order. Lunch at priest. New combat. Uprising in

Warsaw. Exit to the Narevsky bridgehead ...

The day is bright, the bright sun splashes through the windows. The surgeon is a woman, only the eyes and clear lines of thin, broken eyebrows are visible from under the mask. Apparently, this is a new person in the medical battalion; during my first stay here, I did not see her. A few more people in dazzling white (so it seemed to me after many days of dust and dirt and soot on my face and hands that did not wash off for a long time) dressing gowns undress me, tie my hands and feet. It is clear why: so as not to kick during the operation. I

don't resist. One of the sisters in the mask, apparently no longer young, stands at the head of the bed and throws a gauze mask over my face, and the rest remove the blood-soaked and already dried up, already very massive bandage, almost in a whisper and without malice scolding the one who built it. And I remember with gratitude that inept girl nurse. She did stop the bleeding! My sister begins

to pour a little ether onto my mask, and the surgeon says in a smooth, pleasant voice: "Now we are giving you anesthesia. You will fall asleep and you won't feel the operation itself. So be calm, relax and start counting: one, two, three..." Some kind of demon

possessed me, and I answered: "I won't count. Do it!" But gradually, with each of my next breath, the voices of those around me began to move away. The sister at the head asked me something, but I became too lazy to answer and I felt that the surgeon's scalpel had already touched my wound. There is no pain, as if they are not cutting the skin, but ripping open my trousers, although I know that they have been removed a long time

And that's it. Almost instantly fell into a deep black pool. All disappeared.

Already in the room where the operated patients were lying, I woke up from light slaps on the cheeks and the well-known voice of Tanya's sister: "Wake up, wake up! It's all over." The first thing I asked about and what worried me most was how he behaved on the operating table and whether he cursed. And I was glad to hear: "You were absolutely calm and did not interfere with the surgeon." Either from the effects of anesthesia, or from immense fatigue over the past few sleepless days, but I fell asleep again. He slept soundly for the rest of the day, the night, and only at dinner the next day did he finally wake up.

The unaccustomed feeling of a naughty leg worried me a little. However, my fears about this, an already familiar doctor, who once "patronized" my other leg during my first visit here, dispelled with the words: "Just think, one nerve is damaged! It will grow together, everything will return to normal with time."

And this doctor also said that I should thank fate for the fact that the bullet passed a few millimeters from a large artery. If this vessel had been pierced, then I would not have survived, I would have bled to death. And if the bullet had deviated the same few millimeters in the other direction, then my partially damaged nerve would have been completely interrupted and it would have been even theoretically unlikely to regain control of the leg. And then the finale is a cripple for the rest of your life. But fate, apparently, was pleased to regret again me.

And the bullet from the wound during the operation, it turns out, was not removed. She somehow cunningly bypassed the pelvic bones, they didn't find her right away (there was no X-ray) - she showed up a year later and began to interfere with me both sitting and lying (they cut her out shortly after the war, in a completely different hospital).

Soon we, a large group of seriously wounded, were evacuated to the rear of the army, to the evacuation hospital, since the medical battalion had to receive new wounded, and then change its place of deployment, moving closer to its division, which had advanced forward by that time. Judging by the fact that

during these days a large number of wounded were admitted to the medical battalion, the battles were fierce: from a strong environment

a group of German troops was still trying to break out.

Our 38th Guards, together with the penal battalion, by the middle of the day on July 27, securely locked and held the encirclement ring, uniting with the troops that had bypassed Brest from the north. By dawn on July 28, part of the German forces in Brest and the surrounding area was captured, but the attempts of the remaining to escape still did not stop.

Moscow saluted the valiant troops of the First Belorussian Front, who liberated the regional center, the city of Brest, with twenty artillery volleys from 224 guns! It was joyful to know that our blood was not shed in vain. As we later learned, all the participants in these battles

were thanked by the order of Stalin, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. And for the first time, we, the soldiers of the penal battalion, were given special documents about this. It is not difficult to guess what significance these printed forms with a portrait of the Supreme Commander had for raising the spirits of our fighters, what positive emotions they were

caused...

Already after the war, from many military memoirs, I gathered information about the details of those battles, which I no longer witnessed because of the wound. I quote again the lines from the book of N.V. Kupriyanov "With faith in victory", which describes this period in most detail, which directly concerned our battalion.

... The enemy, with forces of more than a division, attacked units of the 38th division and pushed them back by the morning of July 28. The subdivisions of the division (and hence the companies of the penal battalion) fought selflessly. Having been wounded, the guards (and I knew that the penalty box too) remained in the ranks and continued to carry out their combat mission. The ground attack aviation of the front provided significant assistance in destroying the enemy.

The guardsmen of the 110th regiment (and our penal battalion acted with it) courageously and staunchly defended themselves, and beat off ten (!) counterattacks of the numerically superior enemy forces. His infantry and tanks, having not achieved success from the front, went around the

regiment from the flanks ... Further, it is clear from the book that by the morning of July 29, pursuing enemy groups already defeated and dismembered in these very difficult conditions, our troops completed their complete destruction and left in the area of Biala Podlaska. So during the time I was in

medical battalion, such memorable battles of the battalion as part of the 38th Guards Lozovsky Rifle Division ended ...

Well, in the hospital - again dressings. Two days later, not only was it allowed, but it was strongly recommended not only to get up, but also to move as much as possible. However, the leg continued to remain insensitive and naughty. Nevertheless, with the help of the "drive" invented by me from the strap, I adapted to walk quite confidently, although not as fast as I would like.

The hospital, or rather, that part of it where we, the wounded officers, were located, was located in some large room, and our beds and bunks were bunk. Me, the "legless one", of course, was placed on the lower floor, and above me lay a handsome, my age, also a senior lieutenant, Nikolai, whose arm was in plaster - the bullet had crushed the bone. We met, as they say in such

circumstances, by chance, but quickly and firmly became friends. We had much in common both in biographies and in judgments. This is how it happens in war: a short meeting, but strong friendship and memory for life. Our nurse was Aza, a Tatar woman, an educated girl who knows a lot, it was interesting to communicate with her. And soon more than friendly relations began between Nikolai and Aza. I asked Aza, if possible, to get something to read, since there was a lot of time free from dressings and other medical procedures, and I missed the opportunity to enjoy reading as much as possible. And I was madly glad that the hospital had a decent library. I learned to read at a very early age. And my older brother Ivan taught me this. At the age of five, I was already

entertaining adults with my reading. In the evening they sat me down on a table in front of a kerosene lamp, and I read aloud, not recognizing any punctuation marks, far from children's books. I still remember the book "Life-Being", the author of which was either Dorokhov or Shorokhov. I also remember the content of this book, and now I understand that it was by no means intended even for an older child.

And when I went to school, already in the 2nd or 3rd grade I read, among many different books, both "Ivanhoe" by Walter Scott, and "The Headless Horseman" by Mine Reed, lamented and wept about the fate of Esmeralda and Quasimodo from the "Paris Cathedral Mother of God". Shake me then

Maxim Gorky "Old Izergil", and Danko's flaming heart, and his "Universities". "Together" with Kolenka Irtenev lived "Childhood, adolescence and youth" by Leo Tolstoy. I remember already in the 6th or 7th grade I "stole" from my older brother a very interesting book "Golden Head" (I forgot the author), which I read avidly at night. In our rural library, I managed to re-read everything that was there, and I took up (I think, as early as the 4th grade) the works of Lenin. I was surprised then to see on the library shelf a whole line of his

books.

In my father's home library there were works by Garshin, Mamin-Sibiryak, Garin (Mikhailovsky) and other writers that I had read long ago. No matter how the librarian warned me that it would be difficult for me to read the works of Lenin, I nevertheless insisted on my own. But from the very first volume, without understanding anything in it, he abandoned this idea. At the same military school, when I happened to spend

several days in the barracks because of a frostbitten toe, I managed to read the famous works of Dreiser and other writers. So acquaintance and friendly relations with Aza turned out to be

very handy for me.

... In two weeks, in connection with the advance of the front line, the hospital had to be relocated to a new location, closer to the front line, and many of us had to be evacuated to the rear for long-term treatment. And this meant that later we would be sent not only not to our own units, but, perhaps, to other fronts. I have already said that my romanticism and youthful pride gave rise

to pride in me that I was entrusted with commanding even senior officers, albeit at fault, to lead them into battle. And I did not want to lose this unusual status. Yes, and Nikolai was in the mood after the hospital to definitely return to his native combat team. We even had a conversation with a senior major from among the wounded, the chief of staff of some Guards regiment. He persuaded both of us, after the cure, to come to his regiment as company commanders, or to his headquarters. But we were adamant!

This proposal did not appeal to me also because in penal battalions the position of platoon commander and so

equated to the post of company commander, even the regular category was "captain". In addition, the monthly salary, like that of the guards, was 100 rubles higher than in ordinary units, so we jokingly called our penal battalion "almost guards". And if in ordinary and even guards units one day's stay at the front was counted as three, then in penal battalions - for six days! And so, in order to avoid an evacuation

that was undesirable for us, we decided to run closer to the front in order to get to some other front-line hospital to recover. Realizing that without the primary document on the wound ("forward area cards") it would be difficult for us to explain our appearance there, we decided to simply steal these cards. But I didn't want to expose Aza, who had them, under an unexpected blow. We persuaded her to help our escape by moving away from the file cabinet for a while, and at that time we would do our "dirty deed" and run away. Under the noise and confusion associated with the closing down of the hospital and the

dispatch of the wounded, we, having taken the cards and previously collected simple things, disappeared from view. It was probably funny to see two young lieutenants from the side: one with a hand in a cast and in a sling, and the other hobbling with the help of a strange device from a canvas belt. Stealthily, we, although slowly, but stubbornly moved away from the location of the hospital, loaded into cars. We managed to walk two kilometers unnoticed to the crossroads, where a pretty traffic controller was standing. We

persuaded her to stop the car going towards the front, and soon, clumsily climbing into the back, we were already rapidly moving away from our hospital, where we had spent more than two weeks.

Moving with varying success, "on the bed-posts", not always successfully and often on foot, after three days we stumbled, already quite close to the front line, at the regimental first-aid post of artillerymen and asked me to bandage me, especially since under the bandage I felt some kind of itching. They decided not to touch the plaster on Nikolai's arm for

the time being. A comparatively young, though mustachioed, medical captain led us into a tent under a flag with a red cross. When he unbandaged

wound, I was horrified to see fat white worms swarming in it, no less than two centimeters in length.

Probably, my physiognomy said more about my fright than I could express in words, because the doctor immediately began to reassure me: "Don't be afraid, lieutenant, it's good that for these three days they cleaned your wound, removed the pus and didn't let it fester very much. There is no danger." They cleaned and treated the wound, bandaged it and let him go in peace, prompting in which direction to move to the nearest medical battalion. Imagine my amazement when I recognized the medical battalion already familiar to me! Well, again an incredible coincidence and luck!

Nikolai went through some other medical battalion on his way to the hospital, but he and I were received well. At first, they thought that I managed to get another wound, but when we told what motives we were guided by when we escaped from the hospital, they understood us. This happened on the 15th of August. And already on the 18th (it was Air Force Day) we were again evacuated to the nearest hospital. At the front, "People's Commissar's" 100 grams were issued not only on the offensive, but also on holidays. And since it was a holiday, although we had nothing to do with aviation, before leaving we had lunch and drank what was supposed to be for this occasion. They didn't take us long. I don't know if I

was the only one who had such a strange series of coincidences, but they brought us to a small Polish town beyond Biala Podlaska to the same hospital from which we fled! Having relocated, he was already accepting the wounded in a new place. Nikolai immediately rushed to look for Aza. And here, on the occasion of the holiday, we were also offered 100 grams before dinner. Naturally, we did not refuse the second dinner, and the second glass of vodka.

We did not have time to come to our senses from what had happened, as we were urgently taken to the head of the hospital. He was short, like a wizened lieutenant colonel, on whose frail figure the narrow medical epaulettes seemed even wide. However, he possessed such a "thunderous" bass, surprisingly inappropriate for his small stature!

How he shouted at us! It seemed that the walls of the room in which this was happening vibrated and trembled, as during an artillery raid or bombing. And he called us deserters, and threatened to send us to the penal battalion, because he had already informed the special department about our escape, he was ashamed of us that the nurse was severely punished through our fault, and

for the strength of suggestion, he diluted his tirades with specific Russian juicy expressions. For some reason

(maybe the celebratory double dose of alcohol was the reason for this), everything that happened seemed more funny than formidable to me. In response, I calmly answered him that I had known the penal battalion for a long time and well, and deserters usually did not go to the front, but from the front. The nurse has nothing to do with it at all, since we simply simply stole our documents during the pre-evacuation turmoil. Apparently, despite his

deafening bass, the lieutenant colonel was quick-witted. Relatively quickly, he relented, but still in a stern tone took from us the word that if we feel like repeating our "feat", then we will put him on notice. And then he himself will help us to do it more intelligently.

Well, thank God. Only sister Azu was sorry. She did not hold evil against us, since we dragged her into this adventure with her own consent. And Aza's joy from meeting with Nikolai was so stormy, so boundless, that it seemed to me that it was good that it happened.

It seemed to me that my new attending physician, the captain, a very pretty woman, probably in her thirties, was very attentive to me. At first, this flattered me. And I remembered that when I was serving near Ufa in the South Ural Military District, we also had a doctor-captain in our regiment. Literally all the officers of the regiment were in love with her and often, for obviously far-fetched reasons, tried to get an appointment with her. It was possible to understand them. The captain of the medical service, Rodina, was a surprisingly slender, bright brunette of extraordinary beauty, with huge brown eyes under eyebrows that seemed to fly wings and a magnificent hairdo under a coquettishly worn cap. And the "Song of the Motherland", in which there were the words "Like a bride, we love the Motherland", was then sung in the ranks more often than other songs. True, no one had hopes for an affair with her: one of the deputy regiment commanders was her husband, Major Rodin, an order

bearer, an impressively handsome man. But here, in the hospital, this attention began to depress me somewhat. And then somehow she asked me to come to the place appointed by her in the evening, after dark, to "talk".

Or because this doctor was probably 10 years older than me, but rather because my feelings for my beloved girl Rita, whom I met near Ufa (a separate chapter will be devoted to this in my memoirs), were very strong, but I didn't go for this date. Of

course, her attitude towards me immediately changed, I was transferred for further "examination" and treatment to another doctor - a man, which I was very glad about. After all, I told Nikolai, Aza, and everyone in our battalion that I was married, meaning, of course, Rita. I was sure that our "postal" romance with her would definitely end, if not killed, with a wedding. For some reason, after a few

days, the hospital again began to form teams to be sent to the rear. We had just gathered, remembering the words of the head of this medical institution, to go to him, when our "trustee" Aza herself found us to happily announce that, by order of the lieutenant colonel, we were enrolled in the convalescent team and would move to a new place together

with the hospital.

We realized that the head of the hospital, by his order, prevented us from repeating the "trick" that we threw out earlier. Yes, we really have already become

like convalescents. We were still very young. And in youth, fractures heal more easily, wounds scar and heal, scars on the skin and scars on the heart dissolve faster.

The cast was removed from Nikolai, although his arm was still in a sling and he went to physiotherapy exercises. And I began to gradually feel the first signs of the restoration of independent leg movements. And although he still could not get rid of the "harness", he also began to exercise at the direction of the attending physician. The next

day, we were all loaded onto arriving cars and transported to the Polish town of Kalushyn, which had been liberated on August 1st. I do not remember how far it was from Warsaw, but the advanced troops of the Front, which had pulled ahead, had already crossed the Vistula in some places south of the Polish capital.

We were placed in some well-preserved building on the second floor, in small rooms for 5-6 people (to this

comfort we have not yet been accustomed to!). And then a wounded captain from our penal battalion came to our officer's "chamber" (he did not return to the battalion after being wounded) and told me the good news. By order of the Commander of the 70th Army, awards were made for the battles encircling the Brest group of Germans, and I was awarded the Order of the Patriotic War.

I think you understand my joy on this occasion. And when a frail bespectacled man, a local photographer, began to walk around our wards, we all gladly accepted his invitations to capture ourselves. And the guys persuaded me to take a picture already with two

orders: my "Red Star" and someone's Order of the Patriotic War

It offered to me for this occasion

degree.

I, without much hesitation, agreed to this and, probably, my excitement was understandable when I received a fairly decent quality photograph of the "twice order bearer". I could not stand it and immediately wrote letters to my mother and sister in the Far East and Rita.

The fact that this adventure of photographing with a foreign order soon put me in a very "piquant" position, I was convinced pretty quickly. And it was a good lesson for the future. Meanwhile, my leg slowly

but surely became obedient. Only the complete absence of sensation in the lateral muscle of the right thigh remained persistent. It felt like a thick canvas patch had been glued over the skin.

On the advice of doctors, every day I gave this muscle a long and rather hard massage, overcoming pain. And I had to do such a massage for 10 years! The doctor from the medical battalion was right: over time, everything was restored. And here, in the hospital, it was

time for discharge. Nikolai was discharged a little earlier, we exchanged field mail numbers, but there was no correspondence between us. I am very sorry to this day that our friendship ended so soon, although the memory of it really remained for the rest of our lives ... On September 1, in the morning, we, a large group of officers, were discharged from the

hospital. In my certificate of injury, it was written: "discharged to the unit with sanatorium treatment for up to 17 days."

Apparently, I will never understand why 17 and not 15 or 20!

And what did this "sanatorium treatment" mean? Where? When? What sanatorium at the front? So I didn't understand

it then. As for arriving at the unit, I still wonder how we managed to find our own in that environment. Well, when they give you a point on the map, this is understandable. But from the hospital, and even find an SB, which could have been transferred to another army, not to mention the fact that he left the division with which he fought when I left him wounded? Topographic maps, as a rule, remained with us in the hospital, but during the treatment, the battalion, as in this case, had long since left the map sheets. It remained

to hope for the officers of the road commandant's sections (DKU), who would organize the regulation of the movement of troops along major roads. They were also informed about the deployment of some military units. Moreover, we hoped for pointers installed at intersections and forks in the road. These pointers, made of plywood or from planks, simply simply showed in which direction, say, "Field mail No07380" or simply "Osipov's farm" (as our SB was designated) proceeded. By the way, the abbreviation "8 OShB 1 BF" was deciphered by some army wits not as the "Eighth Separate Penal Battalion of the First Belorussian Front", but as the "Eighth Exemplary School of Bayan Players of the First Belorussian Philharmonic". Famously! By passing cars, which were not very willing to take passengers, with transfers,

slower than we wanted, we nevertheless gradually moved towards the front line. We are three from our battalion, me and two now former penitentiaries, however, still without officer epaulettes, who decided to move together. Having reached by three o'clock in the afternoon to some town with a large church (or rather, a church), we decided to stop somewhere for lunch.

We went, as it seemed to us, into a far from poor house and asked the owner to feed us something, bearing in mind that we would add our dry ration received in the hospital to what the owner would treat us to. But our hopes were in vain ... "Prostrate

mute! Vshistko German taking" ("Nothing! German took everything") such a standard answer here, and then almost everywhere in Poland sounded at any request. But later we became convinced that if a Pole is offered something worth exchange or money, then

not "whistko German taking." Then there was lard, and "guska", and "bimber".
"Bimber"

is a Polish moonshine infused with calcium carbide. Top-notch rubbish, this moonshine. And carbide, probably, not so much interrupted the persistent fusel "aroma" with its specific smell, but was used to replace the missing degrees with a burning effect. Our stomachs were still "refractory" at that time, but then the headache tormented me terribly.

We all knew this much later. And now the Pole has found a cunning way out. He deftly redirected us to the priest of that church, the gates of the fence of which were just opposite.

From him, they say, the Germans did not take anything, he is very rich and "advice" (as the Pole called us) will accept and treat us well.

For the sake of interest, we decided to take the opportunity to look at living priest.

We approached the gate, pulled the chain with the ring, a bell rang from the other side, and soon a kind of window opened in the gate, and a bright red-haired, chubby, freckled girl appeared in it, looking at us with curiosity. Realizing that we want to see the priest, she rushed headlong from this loophole, forgetting to slam it shut. And we also began to look with interest at the cleanly cleaned courtyard with some buildings near the church. We managed to make out several girls, just as ruddy and lush, who, it turns out, were also interested in who had come there.

A few minutes later, the girl who ran to report us opened the gate and led us to one of the buildings in the yard, which turned out to be, apparently, a good home for a priest. He met us with a broad smile at the entrance and invited us with no less broad gesture: "Please come to me, gentlemen officers of the Red Army." We were simply amazed by his pure Russian language and glad that we did not have to look for words and select gestures for communication. And outwardly he was handsome, smiling, and his eyes were somehow wise. He led us into a modest but well-furnished room, apparently a dining room, seated us on a sofa, sat down

himself in an armchair across from us, and a conversation flowed between us. He turned out to be a very interesting interlocutor,

poured quotations from Stalin's Questions of Leninism, from the Short Course in the History of the All-Union Communist Party of

Bolsheviks, often referred to Marx ... Well, well! In general, in all these matters, he seemed to be much more knowledgeable than we are, although we, it seems, also did not climb into our pocket for a word. From his words, we concluded that the Polish people are grateful for the liberation, they like both the Red Army and the Soviet government itself, only if we did not have collective farms. Why, as we saw later, they all hated the collective farms so fiercely, we did not fully understand, considering the collective farms to be the most correct

form of agricultural production. But then, much later, we became convinced that fascist propaganda long, unbridled and subtly slandered the Soviet Union, trying to kindle hatred in the Poles for our country and for the Soviet people in general. It was already after the Victory that we were shown a Goebbels-style propaganda film that fooled

heads and the Germans themselves ...

While our conversation was going on, the girls took turns (and there were probably more than ten of them!) Dashing back and forth, setting the table. And when the hospitable host invited us to the table, we were simply stunned. None of us have ever seen such an abundance of various dishes, wines and snacks. Of course, we did not miss the opportunity. And the wine was unusual for us, and we tried cognac for the first time (didn't like it!). We got to know the taste of both real, branded Polish vodka "Vyborova" (selected), and "Monopolka". Yes, and many of the dishes were a curiosity. Yes,

our Pole was not mistaken: here "German" did not take anything, but maybe even add some stuff.

Both the conversation and the feast lasted almost until dark. Gallantly, as best we could, we thanked for the hospitality, for the excellent dinner and for the meaningful conversation, and said that we would remember this meeting for a long time. And yes, I

still remember it! We went out, accompanied by the priest and almost all the girls who followed us at some respectable distance, warmly said goodbye to the priest, and bowed to the girls. We returned

again to the Pole, who kicked us so well, in order to thank him for his good advice. Well, here, under the influence of priestly treats and good wine, we wanted to

talk to this Pole. And since it was already dark, they asked to spend the night with him. ... This

owner turned out to be a graced roll, a cheerful man. He gave us to understand that he was not such a devout Catholic, as, apparently, many other Poles. We spent

the night at his place, in the morning we had breakfast with our dry rations with "kava", which the gracious owner treated us to. We left him a jar of American processed cheese and set off on our way. Oddly enough, we

found our penal battalion more or less easily, although we were somewhat discouraged by the pointers "Osipov Baturin's economy." We thought that some part of Baturin, unknown to us, was also located next to our battalion.

But it turned out that our battalion commander, Colonel Osipov, left us for the position of either commander of a rifle division, or deputy division commander. Here is the jump! From the commander of a battalion, even a separate one, even a penal one - immediately to a division! Although we knew for a long time that in the position of battalion commander of the penal he received the rank of colonel and enjoyed the rights of a division commander. Vasily Lozovoy, our chief of staff, also received a promotion, becoming somewhere the chief of staff of the brigade. Instead, the chief of staff of our battalion was appointed his first deputy Philip Kiselev, my age and friend.

In general, I have already said that our unit commanders had the rights and opportunities to receive military ranks one step higher than in ordinary troops: a platoon commander - a captain, a commander - a major, a deputy. battalion commander lieutenant colonel. Such was the peculiarity of the penal battalion in its official hierarchy. Of course,

we were glad about this appointment of our "baty", but we also regretted that a caring, intelligent and honest commander had left us. And instead of him, Lieutenant Colonel Baturin was appointed battalion commander. He came to us with one medal "XX Years of the Red Army". He himself was one of the political workers who had served somewhere deep

in the rear of the country throughout the war. He was an outwardly not very attractive man of about 50 years old, small in stature, round like a bun, with a belly of rather impressive size. His face was very reminiscent of Ivan Ivanovi

Byvalov from the film "Volga-Volga", which was brilliantly played by Igor Ilyinsky, the famous comedian.

But Baturin was far from being a comedian, as it soon became clear. And his commanding qualities, his attitude to the command staff and to the penalty box had yet to be manifested. Until the end of the war,

there were quite a few - as it turned out, more than 9 months.

In his notes, sent to me already in 2001 to help me work on this book, my front-line friend Pyotr Zagumennikov wrote shortly before his death from a stroke: "The new battalion commander was from political workers who switched to combat (team) work at the end of the war. he was capricious in character and generally did not enjoy such prestige both among the officers and among the penalized, as his predecessor, Colonel Osipov Arkady Alexandrovich.

On the very first day upon arrival at the battalion, when I handed over documents to the headquarters, I found out that I had indeed been awarded, but not with an order, but only with the medal "For Courage". I have already said that this medal among us officers was valued no lower than the soldier's Order of Glory. Of course, I was glad of this award, but now I was tormented by remorse that I was photographed in the hospital with someone else's Order of the Patriotic War and sent these photos to my loved ones! How embarrassing!

The new battalion commander handed me the medal somehow not solemnly, not in Osipov's way. He asked what awards I already had, and somehow grinned unkindly when I glanced at his only medal, received not for military merit, but only on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Red Army. His handshake was cold, sluggish, somehow indifferent

and left an unpleasant feeling. Well, the first feeling is often the most persistent, and the first impression is sometimes decisive. This is almost always the case: if the previous boss was good, then the new one is greeted with caution. Somehow he will behave with his subordinates, whether he will be strict or gentle, fair or not, whether caring for his subordinates will become his main business or his own ambitions and personal well-being will be the most important for him. It didn't take long for us to answer these questions...

So, along with the pride in the "brave" medal came anxiety. But will I be able to deserve in future battles at all

any award? Moreover - exactly the order that I now desperately need! I decided not to tell anyone about this trouble of mine, even Philip Kiselyov, with whom I had good, friendly relations. And do not say anything to anyone about my ill-fated photograph of the "twice order bearer". True, I could not resist awarding me the medal "For
Courage",

I wrote all the same to the same addresses, but not a word about embarrassment with the order!

The battalion was stationed somewhere in the region of Minsk-Mazowiecki, which is not far from the Vistula and, it seems, south of Warsaw. Only the name remains in memory. I remember that some part of the Polish Army was stationed next to us in this city. This neighborhood contributed to acquaintance with the Polish soldiers ("zholnezhhs"). Who knows, maybe we'll be neighbors in battle...

As we expected, almost all of them were either Russians or Poles, long Russified. Their army was formed in Russia. It was unusual to look at their strange, by our standards, "confederate" headdress - these are caps with a square, and not round, like ours, top. And they saluted each other not with a palm raised to a headdress, but with two folded, middle and forefinger, fingers. We were also surprised by their morning and Sunday prayers and services. Our neighborhood was also pleasant because the "Poles" often arranged dance evenings,

and they had many female soldiers, so there was someone to dance with. Many of us were somehow not interested in these dances, although some were still attracted by the presence of girls in Polish military uniforms. However, their commanders strictly suppressed romantic relations with our officers and fighters, although they did not always succeed in this.

At that time, our neighbors were intensively replenishing their ranks at the expense of those called up from the liberated regions ("gminas" and "voivodeships") and training the newly called up "zholnezhhs". We also had the formation of one company and reinforcement platoons due to new replenishment, though not massive, as before. It is good that most of the fighters had rich combat experience, and they were used by us as instructors. And they did it willingly, with passion, each according to his own method.

After a little getting used to after a long separation from the battalion, I learned with bitterness about the death of some of my officer friends, my deputies-penalty officers and part of the squad commanders, and regretted that many of my platoon had not yet returned from hospitals. As I was informed, the glorious leader of the Bubble Squad also died. Even now, more than half a century later, he stands before my eyes - thin, taut, thin lips, a sharp look, composure in

everyone, all in motion.

They met me warmly in the battalion, "washed" both the return and medal.

Company commander Ivan Matvienko, who recently received the Order of Suvorov III degree from the hands of the former battalion commander for previous battles near Brest, for some reason re-formed the company, while some officers who had newly arrived in the same positions were in reserve. Maybe I'm tendentious, but it seemed to me that Baturin's eyes were an eyesore to the commander's order of the company commander. Matvienko insisted

that I be enrolled in his company again, which I was glad about. They introduced me to some of the officers who had just joined the battalion. Among them, the commander of the machine-gun platoon, unhurried and, as it soon turned out, prudent and courageous senior lieutenant Zhora Sergeev, stood out with some special silence, severity and firm character, judging by the huge, full left cheek scar on his face. By that time, our machine gunners, or rather, the platoon that Sergeyev formed, received new Goryunov machine guns. They were almost twice as light as the previous "maxims" (only 40 kg instead of 70!). The tape, like that of the Maxim, held 250 rounds. Instead of Fedya Usmanov, who had not yet returned from the hospital, temporarily (for some reason the commander was sure that Fedya would return soon), junior lieutenant Ivan Karasev, tall, strong build, surprisingly calm person, was enrolled in the company.

In general, we were formed under the supervision of the new battalion commander and his headquarters, and also under the influence of the prevailing circumstances very energetically. At that time, in connection with the rarely received replenishment, first of all, one of the rifle companies was formed, and not all at the same time, as before, and this company was given platoons - machine gun, mortar and anti-tank rifles, assuming that

now the battalion will not engage in battles at full strength, but in squadrons. And, of course, the communications platoon at the battalion headquarters was constantly on alert, providing communication between the fighting company and the headquarters in any combat conditions. All day in the morning, classes, and in the afternoon - receiving replenishment, studying sentences and determining the place in the combat crew of the platoon. There was no question of any 17 days, and even sanatorium treatment, although the captain of the medical service, Stepan Petrovich Buzun, specially attached his paramedic, lieutenant of the medical service, Vanya Demenkov, to me, who did the bandaging of the still not completely healed wound, and daily massages, the technique which the same doctor Buzun showed him (I used this technique for many years after the war, until the sensitivity of the wounded leg was completely normalized).

These days we learned that an uprising had begun in Warsaw. Even then, even we, still inexperienced commanders, regretted that the rebels rose at the wrong time: neither our troops were practically unable to help them, nor they to us. After all, by that time the troops of our 1st Belorussian Front had overcome by that time more than 250 kilometers of heavily fortified enemy defenses, with a developed system of field fortifications, on difficult terrain with natural, difficult to overcome lines. The rear and supply bases are far behind. This is what we felt, no longer fighting. Artillery, of course, almost completely used up the ammunition created before the start of Operation Bagration, and most of the tanks and other equipment needed to be repaired. As for the soldiers and their commanders, they were exhausted to the limit ...

And that uprising, as we later learned, began on August 1 at the signal of the Polish government in exile from London, when we, as part of our 70th Army, like many other troops of the front, were just completing the cleansing of the German encirclement area, the army captured Byala Podlaska and fought in the Sedlec area, which is almost 100 kilometers from Warsaw. And

although the advanced armies of the front by that time had captured the Magnushevsky bridgehead on the Vistula, south of Warsaw, there were no forces left for a further offensive, the enemy still fiercely resisted and even managed to inflict sensitive blows on the flanks of the front troops on other approaches to the Vistula.

How much ink was then wasted and papers were written to accuse the Soviet command and personally the Supreme Commander Stalin of allegedly deliberate unwillingness to help the rebels! However, the organizers of this uprising, the leaders of the so-called Home Army (including General Bur-Komarovsky), who pushed the Varsovians on a dangerous adventure, did not want this help at all. They were afraid that the Red Army, entering Warsaw, would not allow them to seize power there, so they tried to prevent even contact between the rebels and the command of the Red Army. From the area of our deployment, we could clearly

see how an armada of American bombers - "flying fortresses" appeared over Warsaw (there were, it turns out, 80 of them, not counting escort fighters). It was a strange sight when they began to parachute supplies for the rebels. In order not to fall into the zone of anti-aircraft fire of the Germans, the planes flew at an altitude of more than four and a half kilometers! Naturally, from such a height, cargoes were dispersed far beyond the boundaries of the rebel areas - most of the cargoes fell either into the waters of the Vistula, or even to the Germans.

Nevertheless, German anti-aircraft guns managed to shoot down two planes from this armada, and more "fortresses" did not appear in the sky over Warsaw. Already on September 13, at the belated request of the leaders of the uprising, who finally got in touch with the headquarters of Marshal Rokossovsky, our aviation began to supply the rebels. And already on September 18, General Bur-Komarovsky, who led the uprising from London, announced on the British radio that communication had been established with the front command and that Soviet aircraft were continuously dropping ammunition and food to the rebels. In addition, our planes stormed and bombed German positions at the request of the rebels. However, this help, due to the fault of the leadership of the AK, came too late. But, still trying to help the rebels, Marshal Rokossovsky launched an operation to land troops on the opposite bank of the Vistula in the areas indicated by liaison officers from the AK. And when the units of the First Polish Army, despite heavy losses, crossed the Vistula, they fell into the clutches of the Nazis. It turns out that by the time they landed, on the orders of the AK, both the rebels and the AK units were urgently withdrawn from these areas. How to call it?..

Under such conditions, as the marshal recalls, it makes sense to continue there was no landing operation. I had to stop everything. And the leadership of the AK began to prepare for surrender.

As General S. M. Shtemenko noted in his second book "The General Staff during the War" (Moscow, Voenizdat, 1974), "the fleeting action of the Home Army, conceived with cold political prudence, turned into an uprising of the popular masses of Warsaw against the Nazi invaders. However, it did not was ensured and the blows of the German fascist command, in the end, led to its complete defeat. So, because of the betrayal of the leadership of the AK, the uprising began senselessly and ended

ingloriously. All these details were not known to us then, but they were widely reflected in memoirs and studies, including in the memoirs of the Commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, K.K. Rokossovsky. With what pain the marshal, a Pole by origin, recalled this, for many years after the war he headed the Ministry of Defense of the Polish People's Republic. Concluding the description of what happened almost before our eyes at that difficult time, I will say that the period of our formation was very tense. The company commander

took another officer into the company, senior lieutenant Davletov, who helped me form a platoon and organize combat training. Subsequently, the company commander, apparently taking into account my recent injury and the need for "sanatorium treatment", that is, bandaging a wound that had not yet completely healed, transferred me to the reserve, and the platoon completely handed over to Davletov, who in character resembled the absent Fedya Usmanov: both of them were witty, mild-mannered, but with a strong character. Soon Fedya Usmanov returned, well "repaired" in the hospital, and there were "two Tatars" in our company, as they called themselves.

And yet, at that time, there were days of "detente", when the film shifter came and in the evenings we watched funny comedies, and films about famous commanders of the Civil War, and short film novels, where, for example, divisional commander Chapaev with the words "You're lying, you won't take it!" swims across the river and already in our time leads his division into battle, and Nikolai Shchors with his Bogun regiment smashes the Nazis, and the hero from the film trilogy about Maxim

shows miracles of heroism in the fight against the Fritz. Even the brave soldier Schweik, played by Boris Tenin, skillfully led the German generals by the nose. All this noticeably raised both our mood and fighting spirit ... We

only regretted that we had never been sent front-line concert teams, which included famous artists. And somehow we were invited by the Poles,

when they had an amateur girl song and dance ensemble from some nearby military hospital. And it was such a joy for all of us - both the commanders and the penalty box! Sometimes they found time here for practical jokes. So, the

head of communications of the battalion, Senior Lieutenant Pavel Zorin, arranged such a prank joke: he planted his radio operator with a walkie-talkie next to a group of talking officers, who seemed to be looking for music on the air for us, while he himself was from somewhere behind a shelter, on the same wave in a clear voice, to match Levitan, he "transmitted" the "sovinformburo summary", containing supposedly decrees on rewarding soldiers, without fail including one of the officers present in the list of those awarded a very high award. One should have seen the expression on the face of this officer when he heard his last name in the "decree". And then, when he, along with everyone else, laughed at the prank.

I remember once a conversation came up about who was physically hardest in the war. Many expressed their arguments and, in general, have already begun to agree that the most difficult thing for the infantry. More than once, penal pilots who drank infantry sweat said that all flight rations, if they had their way, would be given to the infantry. But then the favorite of the battalion, Valera Semykin, the commander of the communications platoon, who soon became the

assistant chief of staff of the battalion, got involved in an argument. His argument was that the infantry captured an enemy trench or dug in at a new line - that's all, then it physically rests if it does not dig in or repel a counterattack. And signalmen with heavy coils and a telephone set are still dangling along the trenches, establishing a telephone connection between units, pulling a wire to the senior chief for 500 meters, or even more, to the rear or to a neighbor, and then shelling will break the wire somewhere - here the signalman is running, loaded like a donkey, and

duffel bag and his weapons here and there. Or, on a campaign, he drags tens of kilometers with a walkie-talkie, and in it, mother, 20-30 kilograms. The "halt" team, all side by side, are resting, and you deploy it, let's get in touch with the authorities. And when almost everyone calmed down, smitten by Valera's convincing arguments, suddenly someone, it seems Vasya Tsigichko, in the ensuing silence in a rich, thick bass, calmly and quietly said: "And all to no avail." After a moment of silence, there was a burst of laughter from those who understood the joke. Perhaps the signalman Valery himself laughed almost the loudest. By the way, I will say that Valery was an outwardly surprisingly calm officer, at least three traits merged into one in his character: genuine sincerity, indefatigable efficiency and rare modesty ...

The formation of units was already at a stage when the company reached the readiness to conduct combat operations on its own, having not only their almost fully staffed platoons, but also ready-made reinforcement platoons: machine-gun, anti-tank rifles, mortar, whose fighters even went through the stage of mastering a new weapon for many penalized - they learned not only to load and unload, disassemble and assemble, but also shoot accurately from anti-tank rifles, machine guns and dexterously fire from mortars.

Through my friend, chief of staff Philip Kiselev, we learned that we would soon receive a combat mission. The situation then was not the best. Significantly north of Warsaw, in

the Pultusk-Serotsk area, the 65th Army seized a bridgehead on the Narew River on September 5 and with difficulty, but held it. However, after September 15, the Germans managed, by moving their strike force - tanks, to push the "Batovites" and somewhat crush the flanks of this bridgehead. But then the bridgehead held out. The German command called the Narevsky bridgehead "one of the pistols aimed at the heart of Germany." And precisely because of this, efforts to eliminate it did not stop. On October 4, as Commander-in-Chief 65th General Batov Pavel Ivanovich writes in his book "In Battles and Campaigns", "... a huge counterattack followed. This was a complete surprise for us. The enemy went on the offensive. German tanks reached through battle formations almost to the very shore" (p. 452).

As it turned out, the defense of the bridgehead in places could not stand it. "Many battalions began to retreat. Every day increased

losses in the army. The enemy broke the battle formation at the junction and went to the Narew ... In the afternoon of October 6, fascist tanks managed to penetrate our defenses. His attacks continued until October 10." And then the general stated: "Our bridgehead on the Narew was given great attention by both the leadership of the Front and representatives of the Stavka, headed by G.K. Zhukov" (p. 458-459).

At that time, being only a platoon commander, in my lieutenant's rather narrow outlook, I could not even approximately judge the reasons for this failure. (Only after the war, while studying military-historical works while studying at the academy and the memoirs of military leaders, did I clarify something for myself, which I will mention below.) But, apparently, a particularly threatening situation arose on the bridgehead if the Front Commander, Marshal Rokossovsky, as General Batov recalls, he moved his observation post to the NP of the 65th Army. And by order of Rokossovsky, to

help General Batov, a tank corps and several rifle divisions began to advance from other sectors of the front and from the front reserve. Apparently, the marshal also remembered the

"Rokossovsky gang" (as our SB was called by the Germans), his assertiveness and fearlessness, if on October 16 our penal battalion was ordered to urgently load into cars in order to depart there, to the bridgehead.

We, like a small stream, joined the turbulent stream of troops moving day and night to the bridgehead with little or no long halts. And against this stream walked

and walked strings of barely weaving people, liberated from fascist concentration camps, with children, undressed and barefoot...

We also overtook army vehicles, often with girl soldiers either from relocated hospitals, or medical battalions, or maybe bath and laundry units (there were such at the front). I don't know what this is connected with, but as soon as such cars came across, our fighters shouted: "Air!", "Rama!", As in an air raid. Maybe that's how they showed their attention to them? During one of the short stops in the city of Wyszki, captured at the

same time as the bridgehead in early September, we

on instructions, they learned that a front-line sanatorium for command personnel was organized in it. Here, I thought, where did this phrase about "sanatorium treatment" come from in my hospital certificate. Apparently, the local medical authorities believed that there would be a place for platoon lieutenants as well. Maybe there was, I do not know, although hardly.

Soon we reached the Narew and after the pontoon bridge across it we stopped in some small settlement (for some reason, many small villages in this area were called "farms"). There the headquarters of our battalion stopped.

The new battalion commander, who was met here by the communications officer of the Army headquarters, soon called the company commander, captain Matvienko, and after a while he came out and gathered us, his platoon commanders, and explained the upcoming plan of action. All the time I involuntarily compared the actions of Baturin with the actions of our former battalion commander Osipov. Immediately the thought came that the former battalion commander would certainly have come out not only to the officers, but also to the penalty box, would have inspired them with his good parting words and wishes. Moving away from us in time, he did not move away, but on the contrary, somehow stood out brighter against the background of people who were small in comparison with him, even if they, these people, tried to show themselves significant, inaccessible. So our new battalion commander did not find it necessary to go out to the people whom he sent into battle, knowing that one of them would never return. Well, at least as a former political worker, he had to understand the meaning of his words as a senior boss,

and he simply had to find encouraging, mobilizing words. The company, as it became clear from the order brought to us by the company commander, was to advance to the front edge of the bridgehead and, in cooperation with some (I don't remember) regiment, go on the offensive with the task of dislodging the Germans from their positions and advancing as far as possible, expanding and deepening the

bridgehead, that is, its left flank, in the direction of the city of Serock. New military operations began to restore the positions conquered, but already partially lost by the troops of the 65th Army,

which will be discussed in the next chapter. CHAPTER 6 Fights for the expansion of Attack through a minefield. fight

with tanks. Going on the defensive. Until the last time I did not have a chance to join the hostilities on the Narevsky bridgehead right away. At first, the company of Captain Matvienko in full three-platoon composition (the platoon commanders were Bulgakov, Davletov, Karasev) with the anti-tank rifle platoon attached to it (platoon commander Smirnov) and the machine-gun platoon (platoon commander Sergeev) departed to the front line, where it was supposed to start a battle to restore the bridgehead. Yanin remained deputy company commander.

On the morning of the next day (October 18 or 19), since the attack was planned to be sudden, the company rose without artillery preparation. Only in the course of the attack did aviation begin to support and accompany it. And the offensive impulse was so swift that the Fritz could not prevent the hand-to-hand fight that the penalty box imposed on them. It was, according to its

participants, a short but fierce battle. Here is what Vanyusha Yanin later told me about this, a commander who always finds himself, as he himself said, "in the main direction." And I will try, perhaps not as figuratively as he himself, to convey his story, since Senior Lieutenant Ivan Georgievich Yanin will never again be able to tell anyone about this ...

When the attackers almost reached the enemy trenches, he managed to throw a grenade there first and, following its explosion, fly into the trench, sending bursts of Germans from their PPSH to the right and left at the gray-green figures of the Germans trying to get out of the trench. Next to them, several more penalists were wielding bayonets, rifle butts and sapper shovels ... Hand-to-hand, hot, swift,

splashed out of the trench: the fighters finished off the fleeing Fritz, those near them with bayonets, and the distant ones with shots.

So, as a result of this attack (which, as we all believed, was inspired by our favorite Vanyusha Yanin), the first German trench was completely captured and the company, without stopping, proceeded to pursue the retreating Nazis, who continued to be "ironized" by our attack aircraft and fighters. The German reserve, concentrated in the second trench, met

the fire of both their retreating soldiers and our advancing ones.

Excited by the battle and the successful hand-to-hand combat that had just ended, with their insignificant losses, the fighters drove the Germans out of the second trench as well. At a signal from the commander, they stopped to take a breath and reload their weapons. The Germans, taking advantage of this respite, organized a counterattack with tanks and self-propelled guns (these are the same tanks, only without rotating towers).

As eyewitness officers later told me, repulsing this counterattack was difficult. Often there were moments when our fighters and enemy soldiers mixed up, there was, as they say, "cutting" hand-to-hand, and only after some time it became clear that the positions captured by the company remained ours.

And we, myself and Fedya Usmanov, who were assigned to the reserve, hearing a not very distant hot battle, were waiting for when we were needed. And suddenly the second assistant to the chief of staff Semykin Valera runs towards us and with him - a political worker, Lieutenant Mirny, who has recently arrived in the battalion. Behind them, the battalion commander's

"jeep" rides almost nearby. It turns out that the commanders on the radio asked us to urgently deliver to his disposal. Well, we thought, it means it is very hot there! Someone needs to be replaced! But let him not be killed, but only wounded!

All four of us jumped into an open car, and the driver rushed us without looking at bumps, without a road, directly. They drove at such a speed that, flying into the parapet of the trench, the car jumped over it as if from a springboard. At this time, it turned out

that our company was already completing the repulse of the counterattack, in its rear there were two burning tanks ("panthers") lined with grenades and anti-tank rifles and one, seemingly intact, self-propelled gun "Ferdinand". As we approached, we saw how a group of Germans crowded around the burning tanks, ready, it seemed, to surrender, was approaching a healthy, about two meters tall, armor-piercing soldier from the Soviet Union, who grabbed his anti-tank rifle by the end of the barrel. He furiously brandished this more than two-meter and one-and-a-half-pound weapon and shouted something, trying either to smash the heads of these Fritzes, or to drive them somewhere.

He very much reminded me of Vasily Buslaev from the movie "Alexander Nevsky", who smashed the knight-dogs on Lake Peipus with his cudgel. And this film was shown to us quite recently, while we

were formed before leaving the Narew, and the impressions of it have not yet been

forgotten. Several of our fighters fussed around the "Ferdinand". And suddenly this monster shuddered, roaring its engines, began to turn around and fired several shots from a cannon in the direction of the Germans. It turned out that the former tankers still coped with this trophy colossus. I am sure that if the car was on the move (its caterpillar was torn), our fighters would be able to pursue the retreating on it Germans.

In the meantime, ahead, where we had not yet managed to reach, our units stubbornly pursued the retreating Nazis. Powerful support from the sky, where our "Ilys" - attack aircraft, nicknamed by us "flying tanks", and by the Germans "Black Death", fired with eres (rockets) and heavy machine guns, inspired the attackers, and the distance between them and the retreating decreased noticeably. And here the unpredictable happened. Either the platoon

commander Davletov himself escaped so far ahead in the heat of battle, or the pilot could not see where the retreaters were and where their pursuers were, but one of the bursts of the heavy machine gun of the attack aircraft hit the lieutenant on the spot ... Barely catching up with the company

commander and learning about what had happened, with his consent, I rushed to the headless platoon, which had already reached one of the German trenches and began to consolidate in it. They knew me in the platoon, because I formed it together with Davletov. The deputy (now my deputy again) reported the losses, which, fortunately, turned out to be small, except for the death of the commander. Fedya Usmanov replaced the seriously wounded Bulgakov here.

But soon we had to repulse a new attempt by the recollected enemy to regain our lost positions. We managed to repulse this German counterattack ... The day was already drawing

to a close, and the company commander gave the order to take all measures to firmly consolidate on the occupied line, prepare weapons for a possible night battle and repel counterattacks at night.

Some stone buildings were visible ahead, as well as ruined wooden houses with stone foundations. At dawn, we had to capture them, and this was the last task.

at this stage. And for this, it was necessary to replenish ammunition, and at least to eat canned food from dry rations.

Well, how can one not once again recall with a kind word our far from heroic appearance of the chief food officer, who this time organized the delivery of food to the trenches in thermoses (albeit without alcohol so far, because, probably, we used our daily norm in the morning, before the first attack) .

And our new political worker, a lieutenant with a badge of the Guards on his tunic, turned out to be quite bold and sociable, and somehow everyone immediately liked it.

... The night passed more or less calmly. Our signalmen quickly set up a telephone line between the platoons and the command observation post (CNP) of the company commander, and he - with the battalion headquarters. Probably, the presence of Valery Semykin in the company helped here, now in the role of assistant chief of staff (PNSH) for communications and encryption work. Apparently, there, at the headquarters, Valery could not sit still, here he considered his stay more necessary. We all received a handwritten callsign table: my callsign was digital, I think "18", the company commander's was "12", and his KNP sounded very familiar: "Bug", while the battalion headquarters was "Vistula".

Only later, when we had to change the place of hostilities on the same bridgehead and we switched to a long-term defense, our call signs changed dramatically. And all according to the instructions of Semykin, inexhaustible in inventions.

And soon Valery proved himself in a case far from the headquarters, yes also encryption activities.

The Germans no longer undertook counterattacks, apparently they also strengthened their positions. Of course, they bothered us a lot with both machine-gun and mortar-artillery fire, but our forward outposts of combat guards were vigilant and did not notice any sorties of the enemy in our direction. And during the night, the commanders

agreed on negotiation tables with the headquarters, and he - with the headquarters of the division in which we operated, about the start time and duration of the artillery preparation, about the signals for tomorrow's morning attack. Those buildings

that we saw at the end of the day were still far away, probably two kilometers, and therefore the line of attack was already

determined by the company commander, was a little further than one and a half kilometers from the trenches that we occupied. And it was decided: at night, before dawn, quietly without shots, using the uneven terrain overgrown with sparse shrubs, even before the artillery preparation, try to reach the line of attack and there already wait for the signal "to attack."

The night was moonless again. We advanced to the line of attack in dashes from bush to bush, and in open places - crawling, in a plastun way, merging in the dark with the gray background of the grass withered by that time. In the evening we carefully checked our duffel bags, packed everything so that nothing rattled in them and did not give us away.

Thus, we, not noticed by the enemy, managed to move forward in advance and disguise ourselves well so that the Germans would not guess that we were no longer two kilometers away from them, but very close. As soon as dawn broke, the sky seemed to split. The

artillery preparation was opened by a volley of Katyushas, whose fiery comets traced their tracks in the sky. To be honest, I was afraid that the projectile would break off from its trajectory "Katyushin". But it worked out. Then, for about ten minutes, artillery and mortars fired, and before the final volley of Katyushas, red rockets soared, as if throwing us all at once. The attack was friendly along the entire front of the company. The enemy failed

to come to my senses, as ours were already at his trenches.

Still, the Germans did not expect that we would be so close, but the relatively short artillery preparation did not allow them to prepare well to repel the attack. Yes, and our armor-piercers and machine gunners competently organized support for the attackers, delivering aimed fire at rather narrow windows of stone cellars, like at embrasures of pillboxes or bunkers. We captured these buildings immediately and, as it turned out later, with considerable trophies and ammunition, and food. I am sometimes asked if the penalty box took prisoners? Yes, there were many prisoners here. Our fighters flew into these

basements only after a thrown grenade, but when they gathered all the surviving Nazis, they turned out to be almost more than our entire company with reinforcements.

Perhaps the described case was the first in my memory when the penalty box took the Nazis prisoner in such numbers. They drove them into one basement, took away their pistols and, like "legitimate" trophies - watches, lighters, cigarette cases, etc., put up reliable guards, and then, after waiting for the evening, they sent them to the battalion headquarters. Their escorts were lightly wounded penalists. Several of our fighters, who, due to severe wounds, could not move independently, were laid on stretchers built from boards, poles and raincoats, and the prisoners were forced to carry them. They say they carried these wounded very carefully, fearing that the guards would not joke if something

happened. In the meantime, the evening was still far away. The company commander had an order to gain a foothold at this line and in no case to surrender the occupied either "farm", or some kind of farm. Now it was necessary to report on the completion of the task, on the situation and receive an order for further actions. And the walkie-talkie turned out to be damaged by a bullet or shrapnel that hit it. However, after some 10-15

minutes, a telephone connection was established. They began to adapt and strengthen the windows of the cellars with large quantities of bricks and some concrete blocks, turning them into firing points.

It seemed to us that we either destroyed or captured all the Germans defending these buildings, since we did not see the retreating. This means that at some distance they most likely had a second echelon of defense, and all sorts of trouble could be expected from it, especially since the forces there were, of course, fresh, and the data on the place we occupied were probably well topographically tied to their artillery, and maybe already well trained. Though they haven't bothered us yet.

And in this relative silence, we heard the clatter of hooves, and then we saw camp kitchens with smoking chimneys flying towards us at full speed, like Chapaev's carts! It was

a long-awaited breakfast, apparently already combined with lunch (and maybe dinner), delivered to us by foreman Yakov Lazarenko, the right hand of our food chief. The day has already flared up and somehow imperceptibly passed far beyond half.

Without interrupting the work to strengthen their defenses, they dined, having previously drained their mugs of intoxicating moisture. They were filled from standard half-litres, given to us at the rate of one for 5 people.

I dwell on the problem of hot meals in combat so often and in detail because this is no less important type of provision than replenishment of ammunition. Both that, and another in war cannot be overestimated, just as it is impossible to underestimate. If the availability of ammunition speaks, so to speak, of the technical combat capability of a warrior, then his moral and physical condition depends on whether he is well fed, and his morale, the most important thing for victory, depends on him. On that

day, we seemed to have become accustomed to the fact that for several hours no shooting was heard, mines and shells did not explode, the rumble of aircraft above us ceased. For the most part, work has been completed to strengthen the defenses both in the stone plinths and cellars of buildings, and in the trenches between them. Somehow, they seemed to relax a little and began to take a nap. And suddenly a flurry of artillery

and mortar fire

instantly dispelled our almost peaceful moods. No sooner

had the company commander reported to the headquarters about what had happened, as the telephone connection with the battalion headquarters was lost. Apparently, during the shelling, the wire was damaged. And telephone communication in the link "platoon-company battalion" was usually arranged according to a single-wire scheme. This scheme consisted in the fact that one wire was pulled from telephone to telephone, and the second wire was the ground, into which pins were stuck from the second telephone terminals.

Audibility was not so

hot, but what a wire saving! And here it was urgently necessary to report the situation, which change every minute. Valery Semykin was sitting at the radio

and tried to fix it. A penal from my platoon volunteered to fix the broken wire. I noticed it during the formation. Then we rarely had "encirclement", but he was one of them. Somehow he was always "beaten", inactive, as they say, "on his mind." In general, I was somewhat surprised by his determination, but I was glad that the man finally overcame this oppressed state of his. And I was glad for this Belarusian named Kasperovich.

However, both 10 and 20 minutes passed - the connection did not work. And here, after the first, rather long artillery attack, the enemy fired short volleys at our positions and the nearest rear every 5-7 minutes. Captain Matviyenko,

our company commander, urged the signalmen to urgently restore the line. And then Senior Lieutenant Semykin, assistant chief of staff of the battalion, leaving the radio station, which he was trying to breathe life into, jumped out of hiding and with the words "I'll go!" disappeared into the gathering dusk.

A few more words about Semykin. He is an impressionable person, easily excitable, but strong-willed, he suppressed all emotions by an effort of will, constantly keeping himself in a tight rein. Outwardly, he seemed unperturbed in almost any circumstances.

About 10 minutes later, the signalman, constantly and unsuccessfully, hoarsely shouting into the telephone receiver "Vistula, Vistula, I am Bug", suddenly yelled: "There is a connection!", although the Germans continued to shell

our positions. The captain snatched the receiver away from him, and after some time, the connection, which suddenly appeared and was still unstable, stabilized. The commander managed to report the situation, receive appropriate instructions or orders, as the connection was interrupted again, though not for long. Then she recovered, and after 10-15 minutes Valery returned. Here's what he

said. He did not find

the penalty box sent a little earlier - neither alive nor dead. He discovered a break, but for a long time he could not find the second end of the wire. It turned out that the shell exploded right on the wire, a decent piece of it was torn out by the explosion, and its other end was thrown far to the side, 50 meters away.

Having crawled a decent area "on the belly" under enemy artillery fire, Valery hoped to find both a wire and, perhaps, a wounded penal. Soon I found the end of the broken wire, but I could not reach it to the discovered place of the break, even pulling both ends with all my might.

Then, realizing the value of every second, under another artillery attack, he cleaned the ends of the wire with his teeth, stuck their steel veins into his palms and squeezed them with his fists, thus turning his body and his

blood into the missing link of the communication line. Already after the war, while reading literature about the war, I met somewhere an almost similar case, when in the same situation the signalman restored the connection, holding the ends of the wire with his teeth, and died. A lot of things happened in the

war. And when Valery felt that the telephone conversation was over, he took out of his pocket a coil of wire that he always had just in case, connected the ends and even insulated the splices with electrical tape by touch. And when we asked him

how he knew that the telephone conversation was over, he replied that it was from the impulses of a weak electric current that occurs during a telephone conversation.

This is how the courage and high professionalism of my friend, officer Valery Zakharovich Semykin, manifested themselves here. Then he was awarded the medal "For Courage". We continue to be friends with him for almost 60 years. And Kasperovich, it turns out,

escaped, deserted from the battlefield. I made a mistake in it. He was still inexperienced, gullible. For a long time we considered him missing, but in January 1945, after the battle for Warsaw, he was caught somewhere and taken to the battalion. But about this
Later.

Short artillery attacks continued all night, and all night we expected a counterattack, which the Germans decided on only at dawn. The Nazis began it according to the classic scheme for them: at first, a powerful artillery attack, from which almost all of us were protected by reliable ceilings and thick red-brick walls of stone cellars. Yes, and direct hits in the trenches of shells or mines this time did not happen. During the German artillery preparation, their tanks and

infantry advanced to a distance that allowed them to conduct aimed fire at our positions. And this means that we could already conduct the same fire on the advancing ones. However, the company commander gave the order not to return fire until his signal with a rocket of red smoke (there were such signal rockets). It was eerie to see the enemy in front of you, getting closer and closer, and to maintain fire silence when the finger itself reached for the trigger.

But then the German infantry, advancing behind the tanks (and there were 5-6 tanks), ran out from behind them and went forward. This was the moment that the rocket of red smoke was "waiting for". At her signal, all our machine guns came to life, both manual ones - as part of company platoons, and easel ones - of Senior Lieutenant Zhora Sergeev. Right before our eyes, the chains of the advancing Fritz began to thin out. On the approaching tanks, "panthers" and "tigers" from machine guns and anti-tank rifles, fire was fired mainly at the viewing slots. And so, when the driver of the tank that had rushed forward, apparently losing his bearings due to bullets hitting the viewing slots, substituted the side of his car for the shots of armor-piercers, this "panther" was hit and caught fire. The Nazis began to jump out of it. Then Senior Lieutenant Sergeev, shouting to his deputy, a tall, strong, bearded man with the famous surname Pushkin, the only one in this set of penalty boxes: "Cover up!" jumped out with a pistol and rushed to this group. I don't know how it happened that he distinguished an officer in a group of German tankers who seemed to be equally dressed in black overalls, but after firing several shots at the Nazis who were near him, he jumped up to this German, knocked him down, pressed him to the ground and held so, until several fighters ran up to Sergeyev to help.

In the coming turn, when the rest of the tanks, trying to turn around, set up their sides and one more of them stopped knocked out, and the rest turned back, the company commander gave the signal "to attack." The rising

penalty box with some special fury finished off the remaining Fritz infantry, which did not have time to escape. And Zhora Sergeev and the soldiers who ran up to him raised and disarmed the German, who turned out to be a hauptmann (captain), commander of a tank battalion. Sergeev got a valuable trophy! The prisoner was soon sent to the headquarters of the battalion under the escort of armor-piercers, who knocked out the tanks and, in our opinion, deserved early release and awards. And this was the

last serious attempt on this flank by the Nazis to regain their lost positions. They didn't dare to do it anymore. And we, developing success, pursued the retreating two kilometers. They captured the positions of their second (or third?) echelon of defense in a settlement near the city of Serotsk and on this

stopped. Several less significant attacks by the Fritz, apparently probing our stamina and readiness to continue fighting, we repelled without much effort.

Two days later, our company was replaced by some rifle battalion, the commander of which, a major, very meticulously asked our company commander about the contingent of company soldiers and very little about the enemy. Apparently, this battalion was not going to advance further. It's for him Turns out we did.

So, during these three days of hostilities, the task assigned to our company was completed quickly, and, as it turned out, with small losses for such a result. Not only did we restore this part of the bridgehead, it was not only expanded to its previous size, but also deepened by 2-3 kilometers. Naturally, the withdrawal of the company from the battle and its

withdrawal to the rear was regarded by the penitentiaries as recognition by the Commander, General Batov, of the courage, determination, heroism and courage of these former officers, worthy of being forgiven, released without wounds, and perhaps presented to awards, as another army commander, General Gorbатов, did in his time, which everyone in the battalion knew about, and this decision of his was considered a measure of a kind, fair attitude towards people who stumbled somewhere, who were guilty of something. When we passed the familiar stone cellars, now already occupied either by some kind of headquarters,

or by the rear of the unit that replaced us, the company commander ordered to make a small halt here for a smoke. Some of the officers and I went up to the wrecked German tanks to look at them up close again. I was surprised that in some places the armor was broken, but it turned out that only the concrete reinforcement of the

armor, rather thick, was destroyed and broke off. I thought that Hitler's vaunted Krupp steel was running out, if here it was no longer real, but "ersatz armor". Maybe then I was wrong. But this was only my first impression of the vaunted "tigers".

Our captain again built a company, thanked everyone for the exemplary performance of a combat mission. "Now shall we sing?" he concluded his short speech. And then it turned out that the young political instructor, Lieutenant Mirny, had a strong and sonorous voice.

From the first step (this was considered a good sign), he sang a song popular then among the gunners: "Artillerymen, Stalin gave the order, artillerymen, the fatherland is calling us ..." With what

enthusiasm the penitentiaries sang in hoarse voices this and other songs all the way to the battalion headquarters!

Having stopped the formation at the house where the battalion commander was stationed, and giving the command "at attention", the captain went to report. Unexpectedly, minutes dragged on for a long time, waiting for the

battalion commander Baturin to come out. And so he came out. Unruffled, calm. And behind him dejectedly walked the company commander. Some kind of strange foreboding seized, probably, everyone. Without giving the command

"at ease" (or perhaps not noticing that the company was standing "at attention"),

the lieutenant colonel rolled a rather long speech, interspersed with hackneyed slogans and official phrases. The meaning of his verbiage was that he, the battalion

commander, on behalf of the Motherland, thanks everyone for completing the

combat mission. From the command of the 65th Army and the name of the

Motherland, he calls on everyone to serve faithfully, not to spare their strength in

the future for the good of their fatherland, to fulfill the new order of the fatherland for the sake of the etc.

Some kind of murmur swept through the ranks, the fighters began to stir, although the command "at ease" did not follow.

Feeling dissatisfaction in the ranks, Baturin quickly concluded his speech by setting the task on behalf of the Commander to expand also part of the right flank of the bridgehead, which, they say, we will get just as easily (here it seemed to me that dissatisfaction with something slipped through his words). If only he knew how "easily" (maybe he already knew?) we would accomplish this new task.

Downcast, having suddenly completely lost the still

smoldering hope of a high appreciation of their feat, the penalists ate dinner without appetite and without the usual jokes at that time, and even the fighting hundred grams did not raise their fallen mood. Immediately after dinner, without much-needed rest, at

least for a few hours, we had to cover 15 kilometers at an accelerated march in order to take trenches in the designated defense sector on the right flank of the bridgehead before dawn.

Where at a pace, where at a run, long before dawn, soaring like driven horses, we tumbled into the trenches that we occupied

units, I think the 108th or 37th rifle divisions, I don't remember. Already after the war, in the memoirs of General Batov, "In battles and campaigns," I read how the commander of the 108th division said that "the battle on the Narevsky bridgehead for parts of our division during the entire war was one of the most cruel." And that means for us too.

Later, studying the materials relating to the fighting on this bridgehead, I learned that in the zone where we had to fight, the 444th, 407th and 539th rifle regiments were operating, whose units "gave us the right" to follow them first attack. But I don't remember which of them replaced us later on the positions conquered from the Germans, and I didn't know, probably, because our company actually acted independently here too.

Since we appeared in the trenches long before dawn, those whom we replaced immediately left the trenches so that the enemy would not notice this change. The only thing we managed to find out from those who surrendered our defenses was that the German trenches were no further than 150 meters from us, and that day and night the Fritz made massive artillery raids, and during the day our snipers and machine gunners were hunting for ours, which,

apparently, there are many. The task had not yet been assigned to us, although we already knew that we were

again assigned not just to strengthen the defense. During the day, we received additional ammunition, including a lot of RG-42 and RGD-43 offensive hand grenades (I think that's what they were called), which, unlike the defensive F-1, had a small radius of lethal fragmentation and were intended

mainly for use on the move, which means, as a rule, in assault attacks. Each squad received one RPG-40 anti-tank grenade. So here it is possible to meet with tanks.

I want to draw the reader's attention to the fact that our battalion constantly replenished with new weapons in sufficient quantities.

We already had new PPSH assault rifles, which were not yet widely used in the troops, instead of PPD. We also received new anti-tank guns PTR-S (i.e., Simonovskie) with a five-shot magazine. In general, we have never experienced a lack of weapons. I say this because it was often stated in post-war publications that penalized men were driven into battle without weapons or given

one rifle for 5-6 people, and everyone who wanted to arm himself wished the speedy death of the one who got the weapon.

In army penal companies, when their number sometimes exceeded a thousand people, as I was told many years after the war, officer Vladimir Grigorievich Mikhailov (unfortunately, now deceased), who then commanded such a company in the 64th Army, there were cases when simply they did not have time to deliver the required amount of weapons, and then, if there was no time left for rearmament before completing the urgently assigned combat mission, some were given rifles, and others were given bayonets from them. I testify: this did not apply to officer penal battalions. There were always enough weapons, including the most modern ones.

Our fighters calmed down a bit, the severity of resentment towards the new battalion commander, who could not or did not want to raise a question with General Batov about a worthy assessment of the actions of the penalized in the performance of the previous task, passed. And first of all - the armor-piercers, whom the new battalion commander for some reason did not really like, returning the reports of the company commander for their awards and release.

Why am I dwelling on this in such detail? Because this resentment for them still lives in my memory, although almost 60 years have passed since that time. And because in the upcoming hostilities, as it turned out in the end, a lot of experienced military officers died, although they made a mistake in something, but they fully realized their guilt, whatever it was, and convincingly proved not only by their death, but and military deeds devotion to the Motherland and loyalty to the oath. Further events developed in such a way that during this day we even managed to doze off in fits and

starts. Some have managed to do this while sitting, some even lying down, in the so-called under-beam niches (long holes dug along the trench in the lower, closer to the bottom, walls without an upper ceiling). It was possible to rest in them because of the low height of the "ceiling" only lying down. Those massive artillery attacks, which our predecessors in this defense told us about, were not long in coming. It can be seen that the

Germans had a lot of artillery here, including six-barreled mortars, which we got the nickname "hogs", probably due to the fact that the sounds of their shots are somehow

sounded like a pig screech. Their mines from a high hinged trajectory fell into the trenches almost vertically, and their explosions were especially dangerous for those who were there. So those we changed and dug

these niches are for protection against fragments of such mines.

I have already said that the penitentiaries, often risking their lives, did a lot to save the lives of their commanders. And I have already said that Vanyusha Yanin, a senior lieutenant, deputy company commander, an officer of insane courage, enjoyed the special love of everyone in our company. So, in order to more reliably hide

Vanya Yanin from the mines of these 6-barreled "hogs" during artillery attacks, the penalists chose one of such niches for him. And in order to strengthen the reliability of protection, they increased this niche so that, in addition to him, at least two more people could fit for cover. During one such artillery raid, his guards from the penalty box insisted that he lie down in this niche, and covered him, lying down next to him. They had barely had time to settle there, when some large-caliber, heavy artillery shell exploded nearby, the earthen ceiling collapsed and overwhelmed those who were hiding. The soldier lying at the edge, with the help of his comrades who rushed to the rescue, somehow got out of this

accidental grave, managed to dig out a barely alive second soldier, and by the time they got to Yanin, he was already dead. Thus, the bravest officer, senior lieutenant Ivan Georgievich Yanin, died, who did not receive a single bullet or shrapnel wound, who did not visit the infirmary or medical battalion for a single day. We were all shocked by his unexpected and ridiculous death. With great sorrow, we said goodbye to our fighting friend and sent his body to the rear for a decent

burial. Already in the evening, our NSh Filipp Kiselev came to our trenches and with him the chief of staff of some rifle battalion, accompanied by several also unfamiliar officers. Philip grieved with us, said that Vanya was buried with

honors.

And in my poem about the penal battalion, which I wrote shortly after Nareva, I dedicated such simple lines to him: Yanin
Ivan! You are immortal, you are with us

Even though a stranger died on
earth. We won't forget you. We will
leave a Place in our hearts for you, our

Hero. Many years later, I happened to head the military department of
the Kharkov Road Institute, known not only in the USSR for its high-speed
HADI cars. At that time, many foreigners, including Poles, studied there. I
asked those of them who live in the area of Pultusk-Serotsk to try to find the
grave of Ivan Yanin during their winter holidays. At that time, the Poles still
adequately protected the memory of

Soviet soldiers who died for the liberation of their homeland from the
Nazis. And now, the students who returned after the holidays told me that
near Pultusk, on the memorial plates of a large mass grave of Soviet soldiers,
they found the name "Yan Yanin, officer." I had no doubt that this was our
Vanyusha.

And then the company commander gathered all the officers and reported
to the chief of staff that he intended to appoint me as his deputy instead of the
deceased senior lieutenant Yanin, leaving me at the same time as the platoon
commander. Matvienko handed me a rocket launcher and a bag with rockets,
which used to be Vanyusha. Somehow,

without much enthusiasm, I met this decision. Then Kiselev introduced
us to the officers who had arrived with him, who told us that in the near future
we would have to attack the front line of the Germans and, having captured
the German trenches, hold them until the approach
main forces.

It was similar to the task that was set before us when we overcame the
Drut River near Rogachev on ice. Then we also had to capture enemy
trenches and ensure the introduction of other troops into battle. Only the river
was no longer in front of us. Narew was already behind and we did not need
to overcome it. It was necessary not to let the Germans do it.

The military officers, leaving, promised that before the attack, sappers
would come and clear the minefield in front of us, if there was one, and that
there would be good artillery preparation.

When I brought this information to my squad leaders, I did not feel that
they were somehow inspired by them. And, spurring his own mood, he ordered
them to more cheerfully bring this information to

fighters and then report to me on the morale of the penalty box, considering this one of the most important components of the upcoming success.

... I was anxious in my soul, as if some kind of bad premonition was gnawing at my heart. Bad thoughts also came, whether I myself would die in this upcoming battle. I tried to drive them away and focus on the main thing - how to complete the task.

After midnight, a group of sappers actually came into the trenches to make passes in the minefield in front of our company. Less than an hour later they returned, and their commander reported that there were no mines in front of us at all, they did not find any minefield.

This news instantly spread around everyone and noticeably cheered up the fighters. The regimental soldiers who arrived with thermoses and delivered a very early breakfast had to leave without emptying them, since almost everyone refused to eat before the attack. That's how it was with us. But no one refused to fight a hundred grams. And so they were waiting for the dawn in a different mood. Yes, and something relieved my heart, as if it became easier to breathe. Even, it seems, took a nap for 20-25 minutes. I woke up from the

fact that it began to get light and the Fritz again made their short artillery attack. Almost simultaneously with this, a messenger ran from the company commander shouting: "The company captain was killed!" I ordered this messenger to run through the trenches and report that I was in command of the company, and that I appointed the commander of the machine-gun platoon, Senior

Lieutenant Sergeev, as my deputy. And the first thing that occurred to me was whether I would now be able to command not only penalized soldiers, but also platoon commanders, my friends, comrades. For some reason, I instantly remembered how we, young lieutenants, graduates of a military school, had a parting conversation with the commander, no longer young lieutenant Parshin. I then firmly remembered his parting words: "Know how to demand firmly, fairly and reasonably. This is the main quality of a real commander. And remember: power does not lie on the road. It seems to me that then, before the attack, and then, throughout my long, almost 40-year officer service, I strictly followed this wise advice.

And, before I had time to think about it, our guards "Katyushas" and our artillery suddenly started talking! Yes, shell explosions fell so thickly on the German trenches that some kind of joyful wave swept over me and for a second the thought came that my recent state was not a premonition of trouble, but some kind of weakness of spirit, or something. I felt ashamed of myself. Fifteen minutes later, the artillery

preparation ended with another powerful volley of guards mortars. Flashes of fire rose from the enemy positions,

fountains of blasted earth. In all this raging fiery whirlwind, nothing else could be seen, although this strip of smoke and fire was no more than 150 meters away. Where can you see "flying pieces of human bodies" here, as Academician Georgy Arbatov, who during the war years was the head of intelligence of the Katyusha division, fantasized about the 50th anniversary of the Victory in one of the programs of the Russian television "My War". As soon as the final volley of "Katyusha" rockets began to trace the sky with fiery trails, as

someone behind our trenches, ahead of me, shouted "Attack!", releasing a series of red rockets. And I haven't even had time to load the rocket launcher yet. Cursing himself for his slowness, he jumped out of the trench. In front of the trenches, I was the first to see Sergeev, who had just been appointed my deputy commander of a machine-gun

platoon. Almost simultaneously with him, the whole company rose. I saw this well, because in the still unusual role of company commander, I lingered a little to make sure that the attack signal was perceived by everyone.

But when I rushed to the line of the attackers, then, having run 50 meters and almost overtaking them, I suddenly saw that fountains of patches of earth were rising at the very feet of the fighters and people were falling. In front of my eyes, the explosion occurred under the machine gunner Pushkin. I saw the wheel of his heavy machine gun take off into the air and could not understand what was happening. After all, there is no minefield, but everything looks like people are undermined by mines.

And then I thought that these were probably direct hits of either rifle grenade launchers (you can't throw a grenade so far by hand), or Faust cartridges that recently appeared among the Germans, or shells or

mines from some kind of high-precision weapon still unknown to us. Maybe because of this they did not mine their front line? I was

taken aback for a moment by surprise, but then I realized with extraordinary clarity that according to the laws of war, which state that a mine or shell never falls twice on the same place, one must run across already struck places. I ran and saw that the fighters were trying, cursing terribly, to pinch the torn arteries and veins, to bandage the bloody stumps of their legs.

Everyone who managed to reach the German trench unscathed broke into it, finishing off in hand-to-hand combat the Fritz who still remained after such artillery preparation and tried to resist, leaving none of them alive and not stopping at this turn. Already considerably thinned chain rushed to the second trench. Fear has already disappeared, only the desire to win remains. Probably, the artillery worked well not only the front line of the German

defense, but also its tactical depth, since in the second trench the melee was short, the trench was simply littered with the corpses of fascist warriors. Ahead, already relatively far away, loomed the figures of the retreating Germans. Zhora Sergeev, with another machine

gunner, managed to send fairly well-aimed bursts after each dash. Seeing that very little was left of the company of fighters who ran to the second trench, I stopped everyone and gave the signal to gather in a denser group. Of the officers,

there was no platoon Ivan Karasev and PTR platoon commander Petya Smirnov. Zhora Sergeev, sitting next to the machine gun, bandaged his leg.

Fedya Usmanov and I were unharmed. Like fate she took pity on us, who had recently almost healed our severe wounds only in hospitals. To my question, Sergeev replied that he had nothing serious, "just a scratch." There are only 15 soldiers left.

And more than a hundred rose from the trenches at the signal of the attack! Almost 9 out of 10 dropped out, and how many of them died - we still did not know! And the main losses were where the Nazis seem to have applied something new.

A kilometer and a half had already been covered, the enemy was not observed close to us directly in front of us. I figured we could do some